

The Ultimate Knowledge Nugget

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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I want to invite you this morning to open your Bibles to two specific places. In the Old Testament we're going to be in the book of Ecclesiastes 12. Now that may be a word that you find difficult to pronounce and a book of the Bible you may not have spent a whole lot of time in but the book of Ecclesiastes, if you'll just go to the middle of your Bible, typically it comes to the book of Psalms and go to the right a few pages, and toward the end of the message we're going to find ourselves in 1 Corinthians 3 in the New Testament. The majority of the time we're going to be in Ecclesiastes 12 and whether you know it or not, whether a part of our Bible reading plan or maybe you've come to us today for the very first time, we find ourselves in a section of the Bible that we call wisdom literature. When you go to Job and Psalms and Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and even as we go next to the Song of Solomon, we call that wisdom literature and that's very important because wisdom by definition is doing what you know to do with the information that you have, and I know many of us know intelligent people who have no wisdom, or we know people that are wise who don't have any "formal education," and so wisdom is teaching us what do we do with the information that we have. And you would have to admit today that we live in the midst of an information revolution. We are subject to so many pieces of information. There are facts, there are opinions, there are ideas, there are perspectives, and one of the big struggles that we're even having in our culture is we don't know what's true and what's not. All we know is that we are being barraged by information. None of us today suffers from a lack of information. We may suffer from a lack of wisdom. What do we do with that which we possess? And today in Ecclesiastes 12, we come to the end of this incredible discussion where a man by the name of Solomon, we'll discuss him more in just a moment, lays out toward the end of his life how to walk in wisdom and he does so in three very simple verses that I've entitled today "The Ultimate Knowledge Nugget." In other words, if wisdom is knowing what to do with what you've got, this is the one piece of information, this is the one piece of knowledge that we have to understand and we cannot dismiss from our life.

Beginning in verse 12 of chapter 12 of the book of Ecclesiastes, he says,

12 And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. 13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his

commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

No matter what your respective educational level, no matter what your experience in life is, today as you read those three verses this is the greatest piece of information or knowledge that we can accept, that the making of books there is no end, of what we know as study is a weariness of the flesh, we are to fear God and keep his commandments because the day is coming for that which is known and that which is secret is going to be made light and God will judge it whether it be good or evil.

This sums up all the knowledge of the world but I want to dissect it just a little bit and just walk through some of the basic questions that we would for any passage of Scripture so hopefully we'll understand just a little more in particular what it means. Let's begin with the who. What we know as the book of Ecclesiastes comes through a very particular who, in fact, there's a perspective here that none of us owns. The Lord used a man by the name of Solomon to give us these words, and no matter what your level of education, no matter how big your bank account, no matter how many awards you've won in life, probably none of you, in fact most all of us combined, cannot do what Solomon pulled off. This individual when he began to rule, and by the way, when he began to rule, can I remind you his dad was King David, and those of you that don't know, his mom was actually a woman by the name of Bathsheba. If you don't believe in a God of second chances, read that story. But nonetheless, here is Solomon, he begins to rule and the Lord comes to him and says, "What is it that you want? What is it that you need?" He could ask for money. He didn't. He could've asked for fame. He could've asked for peace with his enemies. He said, "God, give me wisdom. Just teach me how to do with the information that I have." And God says, "Because you've asked for that, I'll give you the finances. I'll give you the relationships. I'll give you the peace." In fact, as you study the person of Solomon, there was probably none that was greater, none that was wiser, none that had an incredible amount of reach, in fact, today even in the secular world just watch late night cable tv, the Discovery Channel, the Learning Channel, they're always talking about this guy named Solomon, his riches, his wisdom, all the things that he possessed.

Yet we also discover that even though he prayed for wisdom and it was granted to him, he was a man that struggled. Here was a man who at the highlight of his walk with the Lord dedicated the temple. Now that may not seem like much to you but you realize this temple had been desired for hundreds of years. David, his dad, had begged God for him the opportunity to build it, and it was at Solomon's hands that the cedars from Lebanon came in and the gold was manufactured and everything was taken together and it was placed, and for the first time since the promise of Abraham there was a permanent dwelling place for the presence of God. In fact, when Solomon dedicated the temple, it says the smoke or the Spirit of the Lord so filled the temple that they had to go outside to worship. I think we'd say that was a highlight of a walk with God, but he also had some valley moments. You know, this is the same man who went out and decided that he needed hundreds of wives and hundreds of concubines. He brought them into his home

and what did he discover? They brought their idols. They brought their false worship and they led the people of Israel astray.

Why is that important? Because I think when we look through the perspective of Ecclesiastes, we have this tendency to say, "Well, if I had all the money in the world that's how I'd look at it too. If I had all the resources, if I had all this, if I had all that." I'm not Solomon but I want you to understand Solomon is you. He had his high moments. He had his low moments. He had his abundance. He had his dearth. And what does he say at the end of it all? "Just fear God and keep his commandments." But there's an interesting particularity here. Notice what it says when he addresses in verse 12, he says, "And further, by these, my son." Now that may not seem significant to you but it's incredibly particular because when you look at Solomon's life, he really had two sons that were of note: Rehoboam and Jeroboam. And if you've done any history of the Old Testament, you know it was through these individuals that the kingdom divided. I mean, here was Saul, the first king, then David, then Solomon with this united monarchy and it was his children that would divide it and would have wars among themselves. You would have Judah getting the enemies to go and take Israel and vice versa. It got very sordid but it's not addressed to them, in fact, Solomon because of his latter days of life, he probably had dozens if not hundreds of sons, but notice how particular it is, "my son." You know, it's the only time that that phrase is used in the entirety of the book of Ecclesiastes and the idea that we get is, not that he's talking to Rehoboam, not that he's talking to Jeroboam, not that he's talking to the dozens of others, he's basically saying, "I'm talking to the one who's actually going to do what I'm talking about."

Now let me draw a parallel to the New Testament. You know in the gospel of John 1, it says that Jesus came unto his own, the Jewish people, but they received him not. But to those who believe on the name of the Son of God, they might be declared the children of God. Why is that important? Because we discover in the New Testament that you are declared a child of God, a son of God, a daughter of God, not based on your lineage, not based on your heritage, not based on your blood type, not based on your deeds, but do you know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, and because of that, I want to allow this passage steeped in the Old Testament and those of you today that may be curious, you may be concerned, you may be a skeptic, you may be here lost, I'll get back to you in a moment but I want to talk to the sheepfold for just a moment. I want to address Ecclesiastes 12 to those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ. We've come to a place where we've understood we had a sin problem. We've called upon Jesus Christ alone to save us. We've been born again. We've been redeemed. We've been reconciled and now we are the sons of God. What do we have? A message of wisdom. What is it the Lord shares with us? Notice what it says in verse 12, "the making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh." Now everybody who's still in school just gave a resounding amen in their hearts. I know. But by the way, I want you to know Solomon is not against education, in fact, he's in favor of it, in fact, a few verses earlier he says, "I continued to teach my family. I continued to teach those that were in the kingdom." He was not anti-education, he just believed that education should point you to God and not away from him. There's a big difference.

And that being said, when we talk about what is it in our lives that can be so impactful, so influential, and yet such a distraction, let's talk about the information that you and I are subject to. To the making of books there is no end. Right now if you were to go out and decide you wanted to collect all the books in the world, good luck, there's about 140 million of them. But do you realize that the internet can hold 4.7 billion books? You and I live in a world that has been jokingly said by some there's BG and AG, before Google and after Google. I remember when I was a young child, if I had a report in school I had to actually go to the library, not my laptop or my cellphone. We live in a day where the information of the world is literally at our fingertips. In today's world, we no longer can use the excuse, "I just couldn't find the data." The data is out there, we've just got to know how to mine it, and yet here's the frightening thing, did you know the latest neurological research says that your brain is capable of holding the same amount of information as the internet? You can hold 4.7 billion books in your brain and yet many of us have junior moments at times, do we not? It's not that we don't have the information, it's just our card catalog is out-of-date, so to speak. It's difficult to find it.

But information, to the end of books there is no end. Let's make it more specific to believers. We live in a day today where it doesn't matter what book of the Bible, what subject of the faith, there are untold numbers of books on that subject, seminars on that subject, podcasts on that subject, YouTube videos on that subject. We have no excuse but to say there is ample information out there about any subject matter we desire even of the faith. You know, when I was going through seminary, I had the privilege of attending a seminary that at the time had the largest non-Catholic theological library in the world, and I was going through my graduate work, one of the things is they limited us, we could only check out 90 books at a time. That was it, only 90. I don't know why you're laughing, I needed more. I actually had a suitcase in the trunk of my car, Tracy can verify this, and every week when I would go on campus I would exchange a certain amount of books for other books because they would only allow me to have 90. But whether it be that library or whether it be a "bookstore," the very few that are still standing today, can I make an odd confession to you? I find libraries and bookstores depressing. You say, "Why are they depressing?" Because I want to read them all. I want to read all the books, the problem is I don't have time. I don't have time to digest all that information. I don't have the energy to digest all the information. I want to know it all and one of the problems we have in regards to our faith is every subject matter of the faith, there is so much information out there at our disposal and the question is what are we actually digesting in our life.

Then there's the area of influence. Notice it says that much study is weariness of flesh. Now I understand that 2 Timothy 2 says study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of God, and I know in our context today because they didn't have the Bible in print like we do hundreds and thousands of years ago, we are to study it, we are to dig down, we are to delve into its truths, but let me give you a picture of what it would have looked like in Solomon's day when he was talking to his son. In those days, particularly for those that were men, their academic pursuits as far as the classroom would end at age 13, and then the real studying began. You see, they had already read the books, they had already memorized the

formulas, but at age 13 they would become an apprentice to their future field. They would study medicine. They would study law. They would study whatever subject matter it was by observing, by watching, and if you allow me to use a 21st century word, they would download from their mentor that which the books couldn't teach them.

Why is this important? Because today we have access as 2 Timothy 2:2 says to those men and those women who have been the keeper of faithful things that have passed them on to future generations. But it's limited. Some years ago, one of my heroes of the faith found himself in the state that I was serving. I drove across the state to be with him during this conference. I heard him preach, I heard him teach, and at one point after a break we went up into his hotel room. He was gathering his things together. Here he was north of 75 years of age. He sat down on the bed and tears began to come down his eyes. I said, "Sir, what's going on? What's wrong? Is something bothering you?" Listen to what he told me, he said, "I didn't write it down. I didn't write it down." I said, "Sir, what are you talking about?" He said, "It's going to die with me." Now let me transfer that to every field, every aspect of life. It is absolutely impossible to receive all of that which we are shadowing and all that they have lived, all that they have experienced. They can teach us by word, they can teach us by example, they can teach us all these things but at the end of the day we do not have access, believers, to download all the information. We can't read all the books. We can't download all the information. And so you and I as believers are in this quandary, how do we do what is being asked of us if we can't read it all, we can't download it all? How do we respond?

I want you to notice what it says in the next verse, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." What it requires for us is a certain disposition, to fear God. Now when we use the phrase "fear God" in the Bible, that doesn't mean to be scared, that doesn't mean to "terrified," it means to be in awestruck wonder. Allow me to illustrate in the material world. Let's just say for the sake of conversation and I realize what this week is and I promise I'm not trying to politicize, I'm just trying to talk about people in the positions they hold. Let's just imagine for the sake of conversation you got invited to the Governor's Mansion. Let's just say for the sake of conversation you got invited to the US Capitol, you got invited to the White House, whatever it may be that we have a high regard for no matter who is in the particular place of leadership. But that being said, I can make you a promise: your behavior in that place and among those people would be different than everyday life. You will wear clothes that you hadn't worn in months. You'll dust them off, won't you? You're not going to go rolling up in the White House in your flip flops and your khaki shorts. You're not going to do that. Why? Because you understand the weight of the position and the person that you're going to meet.

I want you to think about that disposition for just a moment. We've all had those moments in life, whatever it may be, where we found ourselves in the presence of someone with a whole lot more of authority and power and "prestige" than us. Think of it in these terms when it says fear God. Do you realize we use these three omni words for God? He is omniscient, that means he knows everything. He's omnipresent, that means he's everywhere. He's omnipotent means he's all-powerful. But for the sake of time, let

me just talk about the fact that God is everywhere for just a moment because we live in a culture today and a society that's completely being observed by technology and such but it doesn't even come close to God. I don't know about you but in our home we possess what we call the stalker app. Y'all know what the stalker app is? There's a lot of different ones out there. That means that we know where our kids are, we know what they're doing, we even know how fast they're driving. They call it the stalker app, that we're stalking them. But you know what, it does go both ways. You know, when Tracy and I go out, they stalk us. They're wanting to know how long until we're home. I mean, we know all that. We know it goes both ways. But the reason we joke about it being the stalker app is because as long as your phone has a charge, it doesn't matter where you are, I've got your address, I've got your location, I've got your speed, I've got all those things. I can even do satellite imagery. I gotcha. But imagine what the Lord has access to and if we will dress up and change our disposition to go into the Governor's Mansion, should we not realize that every place we step God is there?

And so we ought to fear God, we ought to reverence and realize there's no place we can go, there's no deed we can do, there's no word we can speak, there's no thought we can have that somehow bypasses him, and so the disposition is we ought to fear him, and then we need to make a decision. Notice what it says, keep his commandments. Now I could go all day on this but for the sake of Sunday school and time and other services, I won't. What is Solomon teaching us through the Spirit of God? That the whole duty of man is not to be popular, the whole duty of man is not to be culturally relevant, the whole duty of man is not to be politically correct. The duty of man is to say, "Thus saith the Lord," and when we put our politics above Scripture and when we put our preferences above Scripture and when we put all of our things in life above Scripture, guess what? We have failed in what God has called us to do.

Fear God and keep his commandments. Now that doesn't mean we throw out the books, that doesn't mean we throw out the mentors. In fact, earlier as I said, he encourages these things. But can I give you some positional advice here? I'm all for your academic pursuits, I'm all for your professional learning. I get all that, but what Solomon is saying is put the word of God above those pursuits, above those issues, above those items. Again let me say it: your pursuit of knowledge and your pursuit of the things of this world ought to point you to God and not away from him. So as a believer, here you are hopefully fearing the Lord, recognizing his authority, his power, his place, his information that he has on us, should we not no matter where we find ourselves be doing what he's asked us to do, keep his commandments?

The second thing I'm going to address on that is this: we don't have the choice to decide which ones we like and which ones we don't. We don't have the privilege of saying, "God, I like what you said here but not so much there." Keep his commandments. By the way, let me share with you, Solomon was guilty of breaking most of them. He didn't say, "Keep the ones that are easy." He didn't say, "Keep the ones that are convenient." He said, "Keep his commandments."

Why? Why is this such a big deal? Why is this so important? Well, this is where 1 Corinthians 3 comes into play. If you'll go to the New Testament for just a little bit, 1 Corinthians 3. This is written to the saints at Corinth. This is written to those who are believers in Jesus Christ. These are written to people who are seated in the heavenlies, they're the children of God, they're saved, they're born again, they're redeemed, they're reconciled. In 1 Corinthians 3 beginning in verse 11 it says,

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

What is that saying? There is coming a day of verification. Now we've all been through some type of legal process or documentation where somebody has to stamp and verify you are who you say you are, you're being notarized, you're being validated, whatever words you want to use. There's a day of verification coming, believer, where you and I as the children of God are going to do exactly what 1 Corinthians 3 says, we're going to stand before our Savior and when we do, it says everything that we've been a part of is going to be categorized, it's going to be verified. It's either wood, hay or stubble, or it's gold, silver and precious jewels. Can I ask you a question? You spending more time in the haystack than the gold refiner? You spending more time in the stubble than you are the jewelry store? You get the analogy. In other words, there's a day coming as a believer where we're going to stand before the Lord and a verdict is going to be declared. It's the same thing that Solomon taught us in verse 14 of chapter 12 of Ecclesiastes, it's going to be determined is it good or is it evil.

Notice what it says here: it's going to be tried by fire. Now I don't know exactly what that's going to look like but I've got a funny idea because every picture you have of Jesus Christ at his "Second Coming," he has his eyes as a fire, and I used to have an old football coach who used to joke, "Look me in the eyes, son, because the eyes are the window to your soul." When we see Jesus face-to-face, when we see him eye-to-eye, you think that political correctness is going to matter? You think all of the things of the earth, the wood, the hay and stubble? No. What does it say, though? There's an opportunity for reward.

But I want to show you the very last statement in verse 15, it says, "yet so as by fire." What does that mean? That means if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, one day you'll stand accountable to the Lord of that which you've done in the flesh, whether it be good or evil. You're going to have to give an account for the wood, the hay, the stubble, the gold, the silver, the precious jewels, but according to the word of God, you don't have to worry about eternity in a place the Bible calls hell, this is about rewards, not about heaven and hell. This isn't talking about eternity for a believer, and so as a believer who's

saved, the question is: why are we wasting our time with wood, hay and stubble when one day it's all going to pass away?

You know, earlier in the message I mentioned those of you who possibly were skeptics, doubters, curious, maybe just standing your distance. Notice that last statement again, "yet as by fire." You know, Jesus talked about a subject matter twice as much as he did another in the Scripture. You know, Jesus talked about hell twice as much as he did heaven and there's a lot of people who are walking around on planet earth thinking that their good deeds, their good works, their altruism, their generosity, their disposition, their political correctness, whatever it may be, that they think somehow, someway that's what is "pleasing to God" and allows them eternal life in a place the Bible calls heaven. According to what we read, it's only Jesus Christ that can be our foundation. As a believer in Jesus Christ, one day I'm going to experience a fire of purification of my wood, hay and stubble, but I don't have to worry about an eternal fire. As someone who does not believe in Jesus Christ, it's much the opposite for you. You see, as a Christian, as a believer, one day we will be remorseful that we wasted our time on wood, hay and stubble, but as a non-believer, you're going to be remorseful that you spent all your time on what you thought was gold and silver and precious jewels and you realize you didn't have the right foundation.

You see, what we discover in Scripture is that as a believer we build upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, as a non-believer we have no foundation. If you have the foundation of Jesus Christ according to that last statement, you are one day saved from the fire, if you do not, then you are not, and the greatest piece of wisdom in the world is simply summed up in this: if you are not already saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, get saved today. You have enough information, you just now need to act on what you know.