Summary and Goal
Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived (1 Kings 3:12), wrote three Old Testament books of wisdom: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. The latter is a celebration of love in marriage, and the former has the feel of a father passing on his collected wisdom to his son. But Ecclesiastes is different; it feels like a bitter old man expressing regret over a wasted life. In this session, we will see that while Ecclesiastes seems to have more in common with existentialist philosophy than with Judeo-Christian Scripture, the book absolutely belongs in the Bible. We will see that more than any other book, Ecclesiastes helps us understand the limits of human wisdom and shows us the futility of pursuing the things of the world.

Session Outline
1. The Futility of Human Wisdom (Eccl. 1:12-18)
2. The Futility of Pleasure (Eccl. 2:1-3)
3. The Futility of Possessions (Eccl. 2:4-11)

Session in a Sentence
Wisdom is found in recognizing the futility of pursuing the things of the world.

Christ Connection
Wisdom is the skill of living faithfully in God’s world, but all of us have sinned. Wisdom shows us how to live but cannot save us. For this reason, Jesus became God-given wisdom for us (1 Cor. 1:30) so that through His death and resurrection (which appear foolish to the world), we might be saved according to the wise plan of God.

Missional Application
Because God has given us His wisdom in place of our foolishness, we live with purpose as we call on others to turn to Jesus Christ, who became wisdom from God for us.
EXPLAIN: Use the paragraphs in the DDG (p. 103) to recount briefly Augustine’s life and conversion.

In the fourth century, Augustine, age seventeen, set out to find wisdom and fulfillment. He embraced a hedonistic, dualistic religious philosophy, which ridiculed his mother’s Christian faith in favor of rationalism and permitted his desire for sexual exploits.

But he found no fulfillment. Instead, he felt enslaved to his passions and struggled for freedom within himself. One day, Augustine heard a child chanting a playground jingle: “Take and read.” So Augustine picked up a collection of Paul’s epistles and read Romans 13:13-14: “Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and don’t make plans to gratify the desires of the flesh.” Reading these verses at this time changed the course of Augustine’s life, and he became one of the most influential theologians in church history.

SAY: When Augustine set out looking for wisdom and fulfillment, he did not find it because he was looking in the wrong places. But when God drew him to look to the Lord for the longing of his soul, he found it.

INTERACT: Ask your group the following question.

What are some ways people try to find fulfillment apart from God? (through selfish pursuits of wealth, power, and sex; in false religions; through human-centered philanthropy and good deeds to help others; through good works in the Lord’s name but apart from faith in Jesus)

SUMMARIZE: In this session, we will see that while Ecclesiastes seems to have more in common with existentialist philosophy than with Judeo-Christian Scripture, the book absolutely belongs in the Bible. We will see that more than any other book, Ecclesiastes helps us understand the limits of human wisdom and shows us the futility of pursuing the things of the world.

For session-by-session training videos, please visit MinistryGrid.com/GospelProject. For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit GospelProject.com/additional-resources.
Point 1: The Futility of Human Wisdom (Eccl. 1:12-18)

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 (DDG p. 104).

12 I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 I applied my mind to examine and explore through wisdom all that is done under heaven. God has given people this miserable task to keep them occupied. 14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun and have found everything to be futile, a pursuit of the wind.

15 What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

16 I said to myself, “See, I have amassed wisdom far beyond all those who were over Jerusalem before me, and my mind has thoroughly grasped wisdom and knowledge.” 17 I applied my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly; I learned that this too is a pursuit of the wind.

18 For with much wisdom is much sorrow; as knowledge increases, grief increases.

PACK ITEM 12: SOLOMON’S WISDOM: Pass out copies of this handout, an overview of Solomon’s wisdom in Scripture. Briefly provide the evidence for Solomon as the author of Ecclesiastes. Then use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 104) to explain Solomon’s teaching in this book: Everything is futile under the sun.

- While Solomon is not explicitly named as the author of Ecclesiastes, the first verse of the book identifies the author as “the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem.” Since Ecclesiastes 12:9 speaks of the author as a writer of proverbs, the internal evidence points to Solomon as the author. Additionally, the accounts of superlative wisdom (1:16), great building projects (2:4-5), and vast wealth (2:8-9) all correspond to descriptions of Solomon (1 Kings 4:29-31; 9:15-19; 10:14-23).

Solomon wanted the reader to understand that everything is like a breath, like a mist that vanishes—everything is “futile” (see Eccl. 1:2-3). Nothing lasts, and if nothing lasts, then nothing matters. Even human life is like a vapor (see Jas. 4:14). Of course, one’s perspective matters. All of life is under God’s sovereign rule, but so often we live as if life “under the sun” is all there is. This is like trying to chase after the wind—futile.

- In Ecclesiastes 1:2-3, Solomon presented the thesis for the book: “Absolute futility. Everything is futile. What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?” The word translated “futility” is the Hebrew word hebel, which means “breath” or “breathing.” Hebel is used in Job 7:16 to describe the fleeting nature of life: “My days are a breath.”

INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

How might an “under the sun” perspective manifest itself in our lives? (we choose to sin as if there were no consequences; we forget to pray to God; we ignore opportunities to share the gospel with others; we fail to consider the interests of others in our decision-making)
**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 104) to highlight the Book of Ecclesiastes as Solomon’s experiment of using his wisdom *without faith* to explore all this world had to offer for its own sake.

Another way to say life “under the sun” is to say life *without faith* in the one true God. The grand experiment of Ecclesiastes was this wise man taking his God-given wisdom to explore all this world had to offer for its own sake. But all Solomon’s wisdom did was bury him in sadness because his *human* wisdom had no meaning. Life and wisdom and even the Book of Ecclesiastes only make sense when they are linked to God in faith.

- Though there are references to God sprinkled throughout Ecclesiastes, only rarely did Solomon speak of fearing God or showing reverence for Him (Eccl. 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13), and never once did he express praise or rejoice in Him.
- In Solomon’s record in Ecclesiastes, we see that wisdom apart from faith always flounders. It always disappoints. It always frustrates. It always leaves us wanting more. The reason is simple—because true wisdom is made for more than the things of this world. It is made to draw us to the One over this world, the One who created this world. Wisdom is designed to draw us to deeper faith in Christ, but when we remove Him from the equation, wisdom turns into folly.

**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 104).

**Illumination of Scripture:** When it comes to understanding the *meaning* of God’s Word, Christians do not rely ultimately upon human *reason* in the process of interpretation, nor do we rely solely upon an institution or body of scholars. Instead, a Christian’s ultimate reliance is upon the work of the *Spirit* of God, who illuminates the Scriptures in the heart and mind.

**Essential Doctrine “Illumination of Scripture”:** Because of the vast difference between God’s wisdom and ours and because of humanity’s sinful state, human beings are incapable, on our own, of fully grasping spiritual truth without being aided by the Holy Spirit through the process of illumination. When it comes to understanding the *meaning* of God’s Word, Christians do not rely ultimately upon human *reason* in the process of interpretation, nor do we rely solely upon an institution or body of scholars. Instead, a Christian’s ultimate reliance is upon the work of the *Spirit* of God, who illuminates the Scriptures in the heart and mind (John 14:15-18; 16:7-15).
Point 2: The Futility of Pleasure (Eccl. 2:1-3)

READ Ecclesiastes 2:1-3 (DDG p. 105).

1 I said to myself, “Go ahead, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy what is good.” But it turned out to be futile. 2 I said about laughter, “It is madness,” and about pleasure, “What does this accomplish?” 3 I explored with my mind the pull of wine on my body—my mind still guiding me with wisdom—and how to grasp folly, until I could see what is good for people to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 105) to address God’s purpose in His gifts of laughter and pleasure: These are meant to lead us back to God, the author of joy.

Why do laughter and pleasure fail to satisfy us? Does God disapprove of happiness? Does He frown on smiling? Not at all. God is not just permissive of our enjoyment, He is for our enjoyment. We are to enjoy God and enjoy what God has provided. The problem for Solomon, and for many people today, was that he was viewing pleasure and laughter as ends in themselves. But laughter and cheer are always intended to lead us back to God, the author of joy.

- Failing to connect our joy with the Giver of that joy is not just a problem, it is wickedness (Prov. 10:28). We participate in this wickedness when we seek enjoyment in things apart from God or we seek enjoyment as an end in itself.
- True enjoyment—indeed, true wisdom—will always be sourced in God alone, in who He is and what He has done (Prov. 3:13). Without union with God as the source of pleasure and glorifying Him as the goal of pleasure (1 Cor. 10:7,31), we are left asking ourselves the same question Solomon asked in verse 2: “What does this accomplish?”

Commentary: Solomon’s search for fulfillment in this life “under the sun” could be summed up this way:

- The Intellectual’s Solution: Study Further (Eccl. 1:12-18; 2:12-17)
- The Hedonist’s Solution: Party Harder (2:1-3)
- The Achiever’s Solution: Work Longer (2:4-7,18-23)
- The Materialist’s Solution: Acquire More (2:8-11; 4:4-16; 5:8-20)
- The Philosopher’s Solution: Think Deeper (3:1–4:3)
- The Religionist’s Solution: Do Church (5:1-7) 3

Time and time again in this section of Ecclesiastes (1:14; 2:1,11,15,17,19,21,23,26; 3:19; 4:4,8,16; 5:10), Solomon reached the same conclusion: “This too is futile.”
INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

What does faithful enjoyment of God’s good gifts look like? (enjoyment with gratitude to the Lord; enjoyment according to the commands God has given; never at the expense of others but rather for mutual joy to be shared together; in perspective that God in Christ is the ultimate gift)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 105) to comment on Solomon’s investigation of pleasure with wine.

Solomon moved on to the next item on his “fulfillment quest” bucket list: wine. In saying his mind was still guided by wisdom, Solomon was investigating the pleasures of wine without debauchery, but he still saw this as grasping for folly. Once again, what he pursued for pleasure to satisfy his heart let him down in the end. It always does because our hearts were not designed to be filled with wine but filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

• The Bible does not describe alcohol as if it were sinful in and of itself (see Ps. 104:14-15; Eccl. 9:7; 1 Tim. 5:23). But drunkenness is condemned without reservation throughout the Scriptures and recorded with shameful consequences (Gen. 9:20-23; 19:30-38; Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:21).

• Proverbs (largely written by Solomon) describes wine as “a mocker” (Prov. 20:1), suggesting that the effects of wine simply mimic joy and are not the real thing. He went on to say that whoever goes astray because of alcohol use “is not wise.” Furthermore, in Proverbs 23:31-33, he counseled: “Don’t gaze at wine because it is red, because it gleams in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a snake and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and you will say absurd things.”

INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

How have you seen the pleasures of this world lead people astray? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)
Point 3: The Futility of Possessions (Eccl. 2:4-11)

READ Ecclesiastes 2:4-11 (DDG p. 106), asking group members to underline all of Solomon’s achievements and possessions in the passage.

4 I increased my achievements. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself.  
5 I made gardens and parks for myself and planted every kind of fruit tree in them.  
6 I constructed reservoirs for myself from which to irrigate a grove of flourishing trees.  
7 I acquired male and female servants and had slaves who were born in my house. I also owned livestock—large herds and flocks—more than all who were before me in Jerusalem.  
8 I also amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I gathered male and female singers for myself, and many concubines, the delights of men.  
9 So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; my wisdom also remained with me.  
10 All that my eyes desired, I did not deny them. I did not refuse myself any pleasure, for I took pleasure in all my struggles. This was my reward for all my struggles.  
11 When I considered all that I had accomplished and what I had labored to achieve, I found everything to be futile and a pursuit of the wind. There was nothing to be gained under the sun.

INSTRUCT: Ask group members to look over verses 4-11 once more and to circle every use of “I,” “me,” “my,” and “myself.”

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 106) to make the connection that all of Solomon’s accomplishments, achievements, and acquisitions had a singular focus: Solomon. Then explain that no one, not even ourselves, can bring us fulfillment—no one, that is, except Jesus, who obeyed the Father perfectly on our behalf.

Solomon was in pursuit of Solomon. If our cultural maxim today is true—“I have to do what’s right for me”—then Solomon should have been the happiest man ever. But he wasn’t. None of his accomplishments, achievements, and acquisitions satisfied him. Even these lined the path of futility. But centuries after Solomon, one of his descendants, Jesus, would show the world the different, true path to fulfillment—Himself.

- Although He is the King of kings and the Creator of all, Jesus was born in a stable (Luke 2). The Owner of the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps. 50:10) didn’t have a place to lay His head (Luke 9:58) because that was what He chose in His obedience to the Father.
- Jesus did not seek fulfillment through “filling up” on stuff, yet Jesus had real joy. His joy and fulfillment were found in His obedience to the Father. He emptied Himself by taking on the form of a servant, the likeness of humanity, so that He could obey to the point of death on a cross (Phil. 2:5-8). He did this for the joy that lay before Him: exaltation with the Father and our salvation (Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 12:2).
If you are looking for the secret to fulfillment, don’t look to Solomon; don’t look to the pursuit of possessions. Instead, look to Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith.

Don’t look to Solomon for the secret to fulfillment. Look to Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith.

Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 106) to emphasize Jesus Christ as the true wisdom of God for our salvation and fulfillment.

In his pursuit of possessions, Solomon again recognized that his wisdom had not left him (vv. 3,9). Perhaps this was more a statement about God’s faithfulness than Solomon’s restraint. God had promised David in 2 Samuel 7:15 that His faithful love would never leave Solomon. Wisdom can lead to moderation and even provide one with the ability to handle excess, but what we all need is the God-given wisdom revealed in the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our salvation does not rest on what we bring to God or what we do with His wisdom. All of us, and most of us by the world’s standards, lack what would be considered important for standing out in God’s sight: wisdom, power, nobility (1 Cor. 1:26-27). Instead, our salvation hinges on what God brings to us—notably, His Son, Jesus Christ, who suffered, died, and rose again. We cannot exercise enough wisdom to do away with even a single one of our sins. That is not what wisdom accomplishes. Instead, God gives us wisdom so that we might turn to the true wisdom that saves from sin—Jesus Christ.

Jesus, “the wisdom of God,” demonstrates forever that “God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:24-25). It is through Christ Jesus, the One whom the world scoffs at and believes to be of no consequence, that God has provided salvation for all who trust in Him. Salvation and fulfillment are not found in wisdom, pleasure, or possessions but in Christ alone. This is true wisdom.

Why do people struggle to see the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealing God’s wisdom? (we cannot fathom how the crucifixion of Jesus can accomplish God’s good purposes; faith in Jesus requires humility and even humiliation in the eyes of the world; as a plan of God, it seems so foolish and powerless in our eyes; Christians themselves can act sheepish about their faith in the gospel of Christ; we are so distracted by what this world can offer that we don’t consider the good news of Jesus)
My Mission

EXPLAIN: Solomon’s repeated refrain in the Book of Ecclesiastes is that everything “under the sun” is meaningless. He was right and still is. To pursue that which is “under the sun” is to chase after a life apart from God. But humanity isn’t supposed to live “under the sun.” True wisdom is understanding that we cannot find meaning in anything apart from God, and finding meaning in Him shapes how we live each day in pursuing Him and His glory instead of our own passing pleasures. True wisdom is found in knowing Christ and living for Him, which includes calling others to join us by faith in the joy of life eternal, in life above the sun where Christ is enthroned for us (Col. 3:1-4). This is what we learn from Solomon and all his futile pursuits.

READ the following misional application statement in the DDG (p. 107), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because God has given us His wisdom in place of our foolishness, we live with purpose as we call on others to turn to Jesus Christ, who became wisdom from God for us.

- How will you turn from your pursuits of wisdom, pleasure, and possessions to Jesus Christ, the true wisdom of God?
- How can your group display the true joy of relationship with Christ to one another and to the community around you?
- Who is pursuing what cannot fulfill, and how will you point this person to the fulfillment found only in Christ?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, every good and perfect gift, including wisdom, comes from You. Neither wisdom nor any earthly pleasures or possessions, however, can truly satisfy us because You have made us for Yourself. Help us not to look to the world’s wisdom but to the wisdom given to us in Your Son, Jesus, and His crucifixion. Fill us with the Spirit so we might speak with wisdom and boldness to others about the apparent foolishness of the cross. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 108-110), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 111) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 108-110) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 111) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 108-110) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 3 as a part of point 2 in the session: The path to fulfillment is not to follow our heart but to ask God for a new one. It is to have God rip the old, sin-ravaged, deceptive heart of stone out of your chest and replace it with a new, redeemed heart of flesh.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- Day 2: “Wisdom is not an intellectual fact or simply a moral quality. Wisdom is a Person who can dwell with you.”
- Day 5: “Without God, there is nothing good. But with God, there is nothing better.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 111) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to help one another carefully consider from where they are chiefly drawing wisdom—from the world or from the cross.
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

Point 1: The Futility of Human Wisdom (Eccl. 1:12-18)

“A universal theme in wisdom and philosophic writings is that the life of wisdom is the highest of all callings. In Plato the task of the philosopher is the purest of all. Here, however, it is a grievous task (we could translate the phrase as a ‘lousy job’). Why is the Teacher’s attitude so negative, and why does he say this job has been imposed on him by God? First, he is challenging the widely held notion that pursuit of knowledge fulfills life and gives a person permanent significance. Second, he finds it a hopeless task; the answers he seeks he cannot find. Third, the Teacher sees all of life as under the rule of a sovereign God. The intellectuals and their work are as much under his authority as anyone else (cf. 1 Cor. 3:19).”

“The Teacher starts the book like a hammer, breaking up any preconceptions that our lives can be fully joyful and fulfilled all the time. Some see this as life apart from God. Of course that is partially true, but that is not the message of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes draws a picture of the other side of the coin from the blessings of Proverbs, and together they make up the full wisdom of God. We might say that the main message of the book is not that life is broken apart from God, but rather that the world is broken because of sin. This is our world’s condition. Many things will come down like a melon on a hard rock, even for the wise and the righteous. Do not be discouraged when life appears broken on this earth; instead expect there to be times of hardship and confusion, and let that feed your longing for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Given the many commendations of wisdom in Scripture, his disappointment with wisdom should be seen in the context of his own frustration (v. 18) and the inevitability of death for the wise (see 2:12-16). As such, the wisdom in view here seems disconnected from God himself, more worldly and focused on the intellect (see 2:1-3), and thus distinct from wisdom as commonly understood in Scripture.”

Point 2: The Futility of Pleasure (Eccl. 2:1-3)

“The word wine is literal wine, but it also stands for all the pleasure-giving luxuries of life. Folly refers to parties, frivolity, and self-indulgence. When the Teacher said my mind still guiding me with wisdom, he meant that he did not give himself over to total dissipation. Anyone can see that a person who has cast off all self-restraint, such as the alcoholic, will not be happy. Solomon never lost self-control or became an addict. Still, even pleasures pursued in moderation will not bring happiness.”
“First Kings 4:22-23 adds some detail to the amount of food Solomon had at his disposal every day: ‘Solomon’s daily provisions were thirty cors of fine flour and sixty cors of meal, ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl.’ It has been estimated that this would feed ten thousand to twenty thousand people each day.”

**Point 3: The Futility of Possessions (Eccl. 2:4-11)**

“Solomon’s assertion that my wisdom also remained with me is important. If he had lost all self-control and had become an addict, then the fact that his wealth and luxury had not made him happy would be self-evident. But he did handle the prosperity well and did not fall into debauchery. It is not only excess and dissipation that leads to ruin, but even indulgence with moderation does not satisfy … Not only did Solomon realize his treasures and accomplishments failed to give him satisfaction, he also understood that none would endure. Consider that virtually nothing remains of all of Solomon’s architectural achievements—they were all doomed to disappear.”

“Solomon now lists all the other things he turned to in this search. So many things on this list are the things many of us think would make our lives happy and fulfilling. Look at all his achievements. He built houses (2:4). Solomon built God’s house, the temple (1 Kings 5–6). He built his own palace, which took 13 years and was bigger than the temple (1 Kings 7:1). He also built houses and shrines for his wives, and he had seven hundred of them (1 Kings 7:8; 11:3,7). Many people think if they could just have a bigger house in a nicer neighborhood then they will have arrived. Or maybe you want a lake house or a beach house. That is your dream situation. Solomon had all of that and then some! In fact, he built entire cities (2 Chron. 8:1-6). Solomon indulged in the best of architecture, the best of agriculture, and the best of engineering (2:4-6). He planted vineyards, gardens, and parks. Your gardening hobby or the worlds your kids have created in Minecraft pale in comparison to Solomon’s creations. He constructed an entire irrigation system to water these gardens and parks (2:6). One can still find these pools of Solomon in Israel today. Literally, Solomon tried to create a new garden of Eden. The phrase ‘every kind of fruit tree in them’ (2:5) is used three times in the creation account (Gen. 1:11,29; 2:9). He tried to get back to paradise, but one cannot get back there in this fallen world.”

References
In this volume of The Gospel Project, we cover the roughly one hundred and twenty years of Israel’s heyday: the united monarchy. After decades of the devastating cycle of sin and deliverance and being ruled by a series of judges, the Israelites called on Samuel to appoint a king for them—one like those of the nations around them. God warned His people that what they were requesting would lead to heartache and trouble, but they insisted. So God, in His kindness, gave them what they wanted in order to teach them to trust Him.

What followed was a series of three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon, each ruling for about forty years. In some ways, these kings provide us with examples to follow: the fierce determination of David not to stand for anyone impugning God’s character; the mercy and kindness David showed to a foe and his family; the wisdom of Solomon. But we also discover that each of these three men fell woefully short of being the king God’s people wanted and needed, each one proving God’s warnings true. Bookending God’s people crying out as one for a king at the start of this volume, by the time we finish, we encounter God’s people being divided into two kingdoms.

Our takeaway is clear: The hope of humanity does not rest in any human king or leader but is fixed solely and securely in the King of kings, Jesus Christ. But at the same time, we see that God delights in using His people despite their failings. God would fulfill His covenant with David, even though he committed adultery and murder. This reaffirmed the promises God had made to Abraham generations before. And though Solomon would succumb to polygamy and idolatry, God used him to build the temple, a place for God’s people to worship and be in relationship with God.

So consider as you study: What might God do through us?