📖 Summer Reading Introduction: The Book of Ecclesiastes

This summer, you'll be reading and annotating the book of Ecclesiastes from *The Message* Bible—a unique and thought-provoking experience that will challenge you to think about life, faith, and purpose in a fresh way. To help you get started, here's what you need to know before you begin. (Don't forget to check out the other handouts in the summer reading folder to learn how you can earn rewards.)

Quick Summary/Checklist:

- ☐ Read this entire handout to be sure you know the whats and whys.
- ☐ Read the Summer Reading Challenge handout to know how to earn rewards and win contests.
- ☐ Read your copy of Ecclesiastes in *The Message* or ESV translations.
- ☐ Annotate at least once every 5 verses per chapter. Each chapter the annotation count starts over because the verse count starts over.
    - ☐ *Students may not use outside resources, AI, the internet, etc. to help them, except for a dictionary.*
    - ☐ **Bonus 1:** You may annotate more for bonus points.[1]
- ☐ Use the different types of annotation options. Be sure to try one of every type on the "How to Annotate" section of this handout.
    - ☐ Use the "What to Annotate" section of this handout to help you practice your literary analysis and regents testing skills.
- ☐ Bring your copy of Ecclesiastes to class for grading by the due date.
    - ☐ **Due Date:** One week after the first day of school.
    - ☐ **Bonus 2:** Bring your completed copy of Ecclesiastes on the first day of school for coupons.[2]
- ☐ **Bonus 3:** Complete the different challenges on the Summer Reading Challenge handout. (The Challenge begins on June 13th.)[3]
    - ☐ Compile your evidence. Be sure to check what qualifies as evidence.
- ☐ Please contact Miss McDivitt if you have any questions: smcdivitt@twintiersca.org .

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[1] Bonus given if all directions fully followed.
[2] Bonus given if all directions fully followed.
[3] Bonus given if all directions fully followed.

👓 Next Year's Chapel Theme: Perspective Matters

Next fall, Pastor Doug will lead us through a chapel series called **"Perspective Matters,"** using the book of Ecclesiastes as a **study in contrasts and perspectives**. According to Pastor Doug, "This series is designed to highlight what life actually looks like when God isn't part of the equation. Therefore, we will look at various texts from the book of Ecclesiastes because it is the one book of the Bible that is largely written without a God-ward perspective."

📖 Why Are We Using *The Message*?

The Message is a **modern paraphrase** of the Bible by Eugene Peterson. It's not a word-for-word translation—instead, it's written to help contemporary readers feel the **tone, emotion, and rhythm** of the original Hebrew and Greek in everyday language.

You'll notice:

- Clearer sentence structure
- More conversational tone
- Vivid metaphors and punchy phrases

While it's not ideal for in-depth doctrinal study, it's **helpful for an initial reading and personal reflection**, especially in a poetic book like Ecclesiastes. However, during chapel and in Bible class, you will be using the ESV translation. You may read and annotate the ESV translation if you or your parents are more comfortable with that translation. **Please ask for my permission to read from and annotate in another translation other than *The Message* or ESV.**

Tip: If something sounds unusual or unexpected, it's okay! Consider looking it up in another version (like the ESV or NIV), or jot it down to ask about later.

✍️ Who Wrote Ecclesiastes?

Ecclesiastes is traditionally attributed to **King Solomon**, son of David and Israel's wisest king. In the book, he calls himself **"the Teacher"** (or "Qoheleth" in Hebrew), which means "preacher" or "one who gathers an assembly." In *The Message* this word is translated as "The Quester." He writes with deep reflection, as someone looking back on a life filled with wealth, power, and experience—but also weariness and regret. In my opinion, reading this book feels like reading someone's journal or diary. Sometimes the author seems to be writing poetry and other times he seems to be writing about his personal experiences and personal philosophy.

📚 What Kind of Book Is This?

Ecclesiastes is a book of **wisdom literature** in the Old Testament—alongside Proverbs and Job. But unlike Proverbs (which gives clear, optimistic wisdom), Ecclesiastes wrestles with the **messiness and apparent contradictions** of life.

This is **not a "how-to" manual** or a list of inspirational quotes. Instead, it's a **philosophical reflection**—one that explores the **big questions of life**:

- What's the point of working so hard?
- Why do both the righteous and wicked die?
- What does it mean to live well?

You may find Ecclesiastes **confusing, cynical, or even depressing** at first—but stick with it! The Teacher is guiding you through **the tension between worldly pursuits and eternal purpose**, and the ending pulls everything together with truth and hope. (Pastor Doug and I will help you understand this book better. Do your best on your first read.)

💡 Final Encouragement

Ecclesiastes might not be the most "uplifting" book you'll ever read, but it might be one of the most important. It will challenge your assumptions, confront your habits, and ask you to consider what your life is really built on, what perspectives you have. In the end, it will point you to **God's perspective**, which is the only one that lasts.

> *"The last and final word is this: Fear God. Do what he tells you."*
> —Ecclesiastes 12:13 (*The Message*)

How to Annotate

As you read, **underline, circle, highlight**, but always write **margin notes** when you mark up a text. Try using these prompts, questions, and types of annotations:

- 💭 **Thoughts & Reflections:** Write your reaction to the author's ideas. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
    - ❓ "I wonder why…"
    - 👓 "This shows a new perspective on…"
    - 🔎 What does this passage say about the meaning (or meaninglessness) of life?
    - 🕰️ What observations does the Teacher make about time, aging, or death?
    - 💬 What truths can I take from this—and how do they contrast with what the world says?
    - ✝️ What does this teach me about God, eternity, or wisdom from a biblical perspective?
- 🧠 **Author's Message:** Note what the Teacher is really trying to say. What's the big idea of the passage?
- 😲 **Personal Response:** How does this make you feel? What surprised, challenged, or encouraged you?
    - 💭 "This reminds me of…"
- 🧩 **Inferences & Guesses:** Make a guess about what the author believes about life, death, or God.
- 💬 **Favorite Lines:** Highlight a line that's meaningful, beautiful, or powerful to you. Discuss what you like about it.
- ❗ **Unusual or Interesting Words:** Mark words or phrases that stand out or sound strange. Look them up! Be sure to write the definitions and/or what you liked/didn't like about the word or word choice.
- 🔁 **Patterns & Repetition:** Underline words, phrases, or ideas that are repeated. Ask why they matter.
- ✍️ **Literary Devices:** Label similes, metaphors, tone shifts, irony, imagery, allusions, and other writing tools.
    - ⚖️ Where do I see a shift in tone or argument?
    - See the list of other literary devices mentioned in the handout above.
- 🔄 **Connections to Life:** Write about how this connects to something in your life, other's lives, literature, or the world around you.
    - 🔄 "This connects with what we learned in chapel/Bible class/church…"
- 🤔 **Questions:** Ask about confusing, deep, or surprising parts. What don't you understand yet?
- ✅ **Answers:** Try answering your own or the author's questions—even if it's just a guess.
- 🗣️ **Arguments with the Author:** Disagree respectfully. Is the Teacher missing something? Why?
- 🔠 **Vocabulary:** Define unfamiliar words or phrases. Use a dictionary or footnote if needed.
- 🖼️ **Drawings:** Sketch what a verse or image makes you see in your mind's eye.
- 📋 **Passage Outline:** Summarize a section with bullet points or a quick structure to help you see the flow.

If you're not sure what something means—**write that down too**! Wrestling with Scripture is part of learning to read it well.

🧠 Literary and Annotation Skills: What to Annotate

Use this summer to sharpen your reading and annotation skills! As you read, be on the lookout for:

✨ Repetition

- Look for repeated words and phrases.
- What themes or questions does the Teacher repeat? Why?
- Ask yourself: What is the Teacher trying to emphasize?
    - Try to answer this question.

🎨 Figurative Language: Imagery, Simile, and Metaphor

- Ecclesiastes uses strong **visual imagery**
- Life is compared to objects from nature. See if you can find them all.
- Mark images that stand out—how do they shape the meaning of the passage?
- Mark word images that strike you. Draw pictures of what this would look like.
- Ask yourself: How do they reflect the Teacher's mood or message?
    - Try to answer this question.

🎭 Tone and Voice

- The Teacher shifts between different moods: **melancholy**, **wise**, **detached, skeptical, or even sarcastic** and **hopeful**.
- Try to identify **tone shifts**: When is the Teacher being serious? Reflective? Ironic? Etc.
- Notice when his attitude changes—why do you think that happens?
    - Annotate for this and try to answer the above questions.

⚖️ Juxtaposition and Contrast

- See if you can find where the author compares and contrasts different people, situations, and circumstances.
- Note the contrasts and think: which one leads to a meaningful life?
- Annotate when the Teacher presents **opposing ideas** and how they deepen the message.

🔁 Parallelism and Rhythm

- Like many Hebrew texts, Ecclesiastes uses **parallel sentence structure**—ideas that echo or contrast.
- Sentences often mirror or balance each other for effect.
- Annotate examples of this and consider how it builds rhythm and emphasis.
- Mark pairs of lines that compare or contrast ideas.

Allusions

- Ecclesiastes connects subtly to other biblical themes—like from Genesis or Proverbs.
- Note any **biblical connections** or truths that remind you of other Scripture.
- See if you can figure out where Ecclesiastes has been referenced in our culture. Hint: There are some famous lines in this book that you might have heard before. Annotate them!