

LOVING JESUS, LOVING PEOPLE, PLOWING A COUNTER-CULTURE

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[Winter Season: January 11 - March 22 | Spring Season: April 12 – June 14]

**LEADER DETAILS:**

- **MAIN TEXT:** Ecclesiastes 12:1-14 (Supporting Texts: Isaiah 6:1-7; Luke 23:39-43)
- **MAIN IDEA:** Eternal joy is found in fearing God and receiving His mercy.
- **GROWTH FOCUS:** As the leader, have that “beyond your comfort” conversation you’ve been putting off – a group member who needs encouragement, correction, challenge, etc.
- **ICEBREAKER:** If you were a color, which one would you be, and why?

**ANNOUNCEMENTS: (Full details at: [emergence.church/digital-bulletin](https://emergence.church/digital-bulletin))**

- **Ringwood Chili Cook-off** – March 1<sup>st</sup> after services!
  - **The Why** – A community building event. Also, to invite a friend out for church. Maybe they don’t like church but do like chili—they’ll end up getting chili and Jesus.
- **Prayer and Fasting – Tuesdays from February 24 – March 31.** In-person prayer in Totowa and Ringwood at 7:00AM (Lent Devotionals every Tuesday via email and socials).
  - **The Why** – Fasting is a spiritual discipline that helps us draw closer to God by reminding us of our dependence on Him. We are intentional as a church to practice this corporately at times. This season, we are praying and fasting as we head toward Easter, preparing our hearts and petitioning God to move in power to see people saved.

**GETTING STARTED:**

- **Pray:** This helps everyone to prepare their hearts as you head to the discussion
- **Watch Community Extras Video** (length 4:26 – questions from video are included below)

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**LAST WEEK’S GROWTH STEP FOLLOW-UP:**

*[Leaders: These follow-ups are meant to offer some accountability while being low-pressure. Keep it casual, like, “If you were able to try this last week, how did it go?” Sharing is optional; it’s always okay to pass.]*

**Outward Action:** If you have an area where you know you just need to take action, follow through on it this week!

**Inward Prayer:** Plan to try fasting with our church this upcoming Tuesday (February 24<sup>th</sup>). Whether for a meal, or for the day, and ask God to teach you joy in your dependence on Him.

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**SERMON DISCUSSION:** (quality of discussion over quantity of questions you get through)

### **Final Observations**

#### **Read Ecclesiastes 12:1-8**

As Ecclesiastes ends, the Teacher gives us a final illustration. He describes aging in poetic detail — bodies slowing down, senses fading, social circles shrinking — until eventually we return to the dust from which we came. Pastor Ryan highlighted two big truths from this passage: First, because we will return to dust, enjoy God today. Second, if all we live for is this life, then in the end it's a wasted life.

- Indulging in a moment of nostalgia, what is something you used to enjoy but now is harder to, either physically or because of circumstances? (meant to be light and fun, not depressing lol)
- Do you think, maybe from your own experience, joy necessarily fades as life gets harder and bodies age? What's the difference between joy "in this life" and eternal joy in Christ? Where have you seen that eternal joy cultivated in your life, and what's been the fruit of that?

*[Leaders: References for you: 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 1 John 1:1-4; Phil 4:1. These verses point to increasing joy and life in the Spirit, and in the eternal fruit of the Gospel – a joy that never fades.]*

### **The Hope of the Teacher**

#### **Read Ecclesiastes 12:9-12**

Before giving his conclusion, the Teacher tells us why he wrote this book. He carefully arranged his words not just so they were true, but also so they were delightful. But more than that, he wanted them to move people. He compares wise words to a shepherd's goad — something that gently but firmly directs sheep forward. His goal wasn't just information, but transformation. Truth is meant to shape a life.

- In what ways are you intentionally passing on what you know about God and Jesus to others — in your home, friendships, workplace, or community? What makes that hard sometimes?
- Can you share an example of when God's Word didn't just inform you, but actually changed you? What did surrender look like in that moment?

### **Conclusion: The Whole Duty of Man**

#### **Read Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**

Pastor Ryan pointed out that after exploring work, pleasure, wealth, wisdom, legacy, and everything "under the sun," the Teacher lands here: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." This is the only true path for joy.

- What feelings rise up when you hear that your purpose is to fear God and keep His commands? Does that feel freeing? Restrictive? Clarifying? Why?

Fear of God doesn't mean that we need to be terrified of him (although left in our sin we should be). We see what proper fear of the Lord looks like, and our right response, in Isaiah 6.

### **Read Isaiah 6:1-5**

When Isaiah sees the Lord in His Glory, he isn't flippant or brave - he's undone. He sees God rightly and sees himself rightly. As was shared in the sermon, biblical fear is not terror for terror's sake, but awe stirred up from a deep recognition of who God is. It's a fear that makes us humble and honest.

- How does taking hold of God's holiness change the way you see yourself? What does "fearing the Lord" practically look like in your everyday decisions?

### **Fear-filled Repentance, Un-earned Mercy**

### **Read Isaiah 6:6-8**

Isaiah confesses his sin — and immediately, mercy meets him. Notice in verse 8 how proper fear led to repentance, leading to a desire to be obedient to whatever the Lord might call him to. His guilt is taken away. His sin is atoned for. This is the heart of God. When we rightly fear Him and repent, we don't meet rejection, but we meet grace. Fear leads to repentance. Repentance meets mercy. That's who our God is.

- When was a time where you feel like you walked with a proper fear of the lord, how did that actually lead to a life of joy and worship and awe?

### **Read Luke 23:39-43**

The thief next to Jesus doesn't clean up his life or earn anything. He simply turns to Christ in faith, and Jesus promises him paradise. Salvation isn't achieved, but truly a gift to be received.

- Why is it so difficult for us to accept that we cannot earn salvation? Where do you still find yourself trying to earn God's grace?

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## **GROWTH STEP THIS WEEK**

**Outward Action:** Have one intentional moment this week where you point someone toward Christ.

**Inward Prayer:** As we fast and pray, ask God to show where we need to grow in awe of Him.

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## **PRAYER TIME**

**Pray** for hearts that treasure what lasts, and for deeper awe of God's holiness; **Pray** for repentance where needed — and joy in Christ's mercy; **Pray** that this Easter we would worship well, and Heaven will rejoice over many coming to faith!