SERMON DISCUSSION STARTERS

What situations in your life have left you asking, "Why?" What is the point of it? Why has God allowed this to happen?" Did you articulate these feelings to other Christians? Why or why not? If you did, how were they received.

Meditate on the lyrics to the hymn by William Cowper *God Moves in a Mysterious Way* in light of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Underline your favorite lines.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

Can you rest in the times and seasons God brings into your life? (Ecc. 3:1) Or are you always dreaming about days in the past or hoping for a better future? Blaise Pascal said in his Penseés, *"Many of us live in the past, reflecting on a season that we have already been through; either regretting the things that we have should have done, reminiscing about the things we shouldn't have done; or we live in the future, planning, anticipating and expecting that some day, things will be good and I will be happy and I will have a good time."* How do you see this in your own life? List 3-4 ways that you try to escape the seasons God brings into your life.

Contrary to popular belief, Jesus used parables to stop people from finding meaning, rather than to illumine people. Look up Matthew 13:10-16. Those who were willing to accept that they could not fathom spiritual truths themselves would pursue Jesus for revelation (v. 16). Those who were not willing to accept this would be confirmed in their unbelief. Could we use the message of Ecclesiastes in our evangelism in a similar way that Jesus used parables to sift his hearers? Would it be right for us to do this?

How does the Christian faith give answers to someone genuinely searching for the meaning of life? How can you bring up what God is teaching you with someone God has brought across your