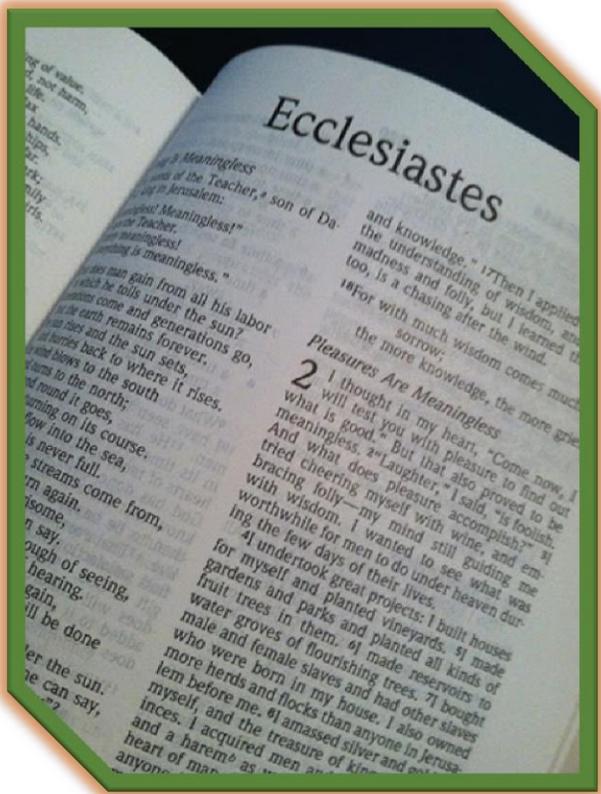


Ecclesiastes: Life Change Bible Study

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“Lord, we pray for a hunger for Your Word. May we, like Jeremiah, find Scripture as a delight for our souls. We trust the Holy Spirit to be our Teacher and Guide. Give us an abiding desire for more of Your Word and a deep urgency to obey what we learn. Amen”

NOW LET'S BE HONEST, Ecclesiastes has been pretty depressing so far. We've officially passed the halfway point of the book, and the entire way – chapter after chapter, verse after verse – we've had but one single message preached to us: Everything is meaningless.

In the first six chapters the Preacher has shared with us his search for meaning (1:1-2:24) and observations gleaned during the course of his search (3:1-6:12). He has repeated his conclusions time and again:

- Life "under the sun" is vanity - 1:2,14; 2:11
- Yet there is good that one can do, provided one is blessed by God - 2:24-26; 5:18-20

In the remaining six chapters the Preacher shares his counsel through a mixture of proverbs and narration. He imparts wisdom designed to make the most of life "under the sun". In other words, while life under the sun is "vanity", how then should we live?

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12 express how to make the most of life. If money doesn't bring happiness (as we saw in Ecclesiastes 5), then the question is: what does bring happiness? The theme shifts from dealing with money to dealing with circumstances in life and how to deal with them.

There are two directional outlooks on life addressed in this chapter: *I can look at life in a negative light. I make no money* (Ecclesiastes 6:1-2) “Here is a tragedy I have observed under the sun, and it weighs heavily on humanity: God gives a person riches, wealth, and honor so that they lack nothing of all they desires for themselves, but God does not allow them to enjoy them. Instead, a stranger will enjoy them. This is futile and a sickening tragedy.” (Ecclesiastes 6:1–2, HCSB)

You can make money but not have enough to enjoy for yourself. Instead, other people derive enjoyment from your money. Tremper Longman notes: “As a matter of fact, in 6:1–6 he claims that many well-off people cannot experience the enjoyment described in 5:17–19, not because they lack resources, but because God will not let them enjoy life.”

The fact is that we can look at our financial situation with a tragic and negative view. The reality is that money is like a river. It flows in and it flows out. Instead of complaining that the river leaves you, one should be happy that the river come by you in the first place. But that is hard to do.

In other words, **money alone will not make you happy**. Stated another way: The Preacher was obviously exaggerating here in order to make his point: no matter how much you possess if you don't possess the power to enjoy it, you might just as well never have been born.

Although the Preacher has mentioned God from time to time, he has mainly been looking at life from a human perspective, which is true as far as it goes. We do suffer a good deal of disappointment in life. We also have questions

that have never been answered to our satisfaction. But understand the Preacher's purpose: by talking openly about our disappointment with life, he is trying to awaken our longing for God. Some of our questions will get answered by the end of his book. Others will be left unanswered for the time being, but they do get answered in the Gospel. This the reason that we need to learn as Christians to live at peace with one another.

Wealth, pleasure, wisdom, work, power. It's so easy to fall into a life pursuing these things as a source of meaning, but Solomon, "the Teacher", has shown us time and time again that, while all these things have meaning in and of themselves, they become futile when he/or she who possesses them pursues them outside of their appointed purpose. In the end, everything "under the sun" is meaningless.

But now, halfway through the book, we will see a shift. All of a sudden, instead of looking only at the things "under the sun," we will begin to work our way towards the ultimate conclusion that Solomon is guiding us to in the 12th and last chapter, and with that change of theme comes a new dose of optimism.

The first half of chapter seven offers "counsel for better living" with a series of comparisons. For example, honor is better than luxury, your day of death is better than your day of birth, a funeral is better than a party, etc. His estimation of what is better may often sound strange, but it comes from who has learned from both experience as well as inspiration (1-14).

The second half of the chapter offers "counsel for balanced living." There are challenging and difficult statements which should be understood in their context, and in the context of the Bible as a whole. It appears the Preacher is mainly warning against extremism, and against the presumption that one can find the answer to every question in life (15-29).

So, in Ecclesiastes 7:1-14, the Preacher talks to us about the value of difficult things over pleasant things.

We might notice that our life seems to be filled with difficult things – difficult people, difficult situations, problems that are over our head, etc. And it's when life is filled with these kinds of things that we're most likely to bitterly contend with God. But, the Preacher wants us to think differently about difficult things. He asserts that they're more valuable than the pleasant things that you and I prefer to experience.

God has made both the day of adversity and the day of prosperity. Rejoice when things are pleasant and abundant. But also, when you're experiencing difficulty – just remember that God has made both.

And the reason he has made both is so that no one really knows what's coming next – it could be prosperity or adversity. And I think the idea is that since you don't know what's next you need to get out of your mindset of life lived merely under the sun and start trusting the God who knows what's coming next – indeed, who has foreordained what's coming next and who can help you through it and whose work is unchangeable – you can't straighten what God has made crooked and vice versa. So, now, the Preacher is going to move on – because he believes that you got the point of valuing difficult things over pleasant things. Next, the Preacher considers contradictions to the law of retribution.

Summary of Ecclesiastes 6 -7, enjoy the good things that God has given, submit to his sovereignty in your life, value difficult things over pleasant things, remember these contradictions to the law of retribution, and deal wisely with the unjust. That's Ecclesiastes 6 -7.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I'm very aware of my sinfulness today, As Solomon observed, not a single person on earth is always good and never sins—including me. Please forgive my failings, and help me avoid extremes of wickedness and supposed righteousness. I depend on you Lord; give me a spirit of contentment and thankfulness for all that you have graciously provided. Holy God, temptations are everywhere! Maybe I eavesdrop on others and am hurt by what they say. Or I try to be wise, and find it difficult, even disappointing. Or I give in to the snares ungratefulness. Thank you for warning me—help me resist these temptations today. Amen.

Week of 16 - 21 November 2020

Opening Thought – What do you enjoy most in life and why? This short chapter 6 continues the focus on making sure we are able to enjoy what we have and find our satisfaction in God. Having the right focus enables us to have a better outlook on life altogether.

Read Ecclesiastes 6

Questions:

- 1- How does God grant us wealth and enjoyment?
 - Why is it important to remember that 100% of our money comes from God?
- 2- Who does the teacher say enjoys the wealth of some people? How does this happen?
- 3- A big family was considered a huge blessing by God in the Old Testament. What is considered the “good life” now?
 - How is it possible that someone with such a big family would not receive a proper burial? (v3) b. What does this say about the family and priorities?
 - Do you see this anywhere in your own life?
- 4- In verses 4-6 he compares the man to what? What is the significance of this and how did he get to that point?
- 5- The teacher lays out several questions in verses 7-12. What are they and how would you answer them?
 - If someone is a non-believer would they answer them differently? Why?
- 6- In verse 10 he says that something is given a name. Why is it significant to get a name?
 - Read Luke 12:7. How does this make you feel?
 - If God knows us that well, what does that mean for our lives?

Prayer Focus – Understanding our purpose, taking comfort in how God knows us

Prayer: Holy Spirit, with your guidance today, may I: Avoid giving authority in my life to foolish people and ideas; seek wisdom to help me succeed; be wise in what I say, so my words don't destroy me; and guard my thoughts from foolish assumptions. Amen!

Opening Thought- We all have regrets. What are some of yours? Sometimes the death of someone we know can lead us to really face some of the issues in our own lives. Wisdom comes from a lot of different ways. Experiences, failures, successes, mentors, and personal study are just some of the different avenues to gaining wisdom. But the most important way is through obedience to God and following what it says in scripture.

Read Ecclesiastes 7

Questions:

- 1- What does the teacher say is better than perfume?
 - Why is it important and how do you get a good one?
- 2- What are some of the ways that the Teacher describes wisdom?
 - Are any of them surprising?

3- Read Psalm 90:12. How does this fit in with verse 2? Is it true?

4- The teacher isn't saying to be down on life or be mopey so what is he trying to get across?

5- What is he talking about in verse 4?

6- In verse 6 the crackle of thorns refers to something that just goes away quickly. Do you agree with him here?

- What are some ways that you see this in your own life or in others?

7- What are the warnings he gives in verses 7-10?

- Read James 1:2-4 and Proverbs 16:21, 19:11. What do we learn about patience?

8- Is there such a thing as righteous anger?

- What does non-righteous anger lead to?
- What makes you angry and why?

9- In verse 10 he says to not glorify the "good ole days?" Why?

10- Why is verse 14 so important? How do you see this at work in your own life?

11- What warnings does he give in 16-18?

12- Why is verse 20 critical to our understanding of God's grace?

Prayer Focus: Patience, controlling anger

Prayer: Heavenly Father, prevent me from nursing foolish anger in my heart. Endow me with godly wisdom and a gracious spirit, so that I may reflect the beauty of Jesus in my life, and be a witness to Your goodness and grace - to Your praise and glory, in Jesus name I pray, amen.

Prayer: Father, I pray that you would refresh my mind and soul, so that I may enjoy the work I am assigned to do. Sometimes I feel tired, weary, and board in the mundane task of this life and my career. I know you have placed me here, in this season for a purpose. I know there is nothing better than enjoying what you do, and finding happiness within your work. I pray that you would help me find joy, contentment, and enthusiasm for my task and responsibilities each day. I am powerless to make my life happy or my labors successful by myself, these things only come from your hand. Father, I thank you in advance for your blessings. In Jesus Name, amen

WHAT'S IN YOUR DISCIPLESHIP WALLET?

DISCIPLESHIP IS A MATTER OF STEWARDSHIP!

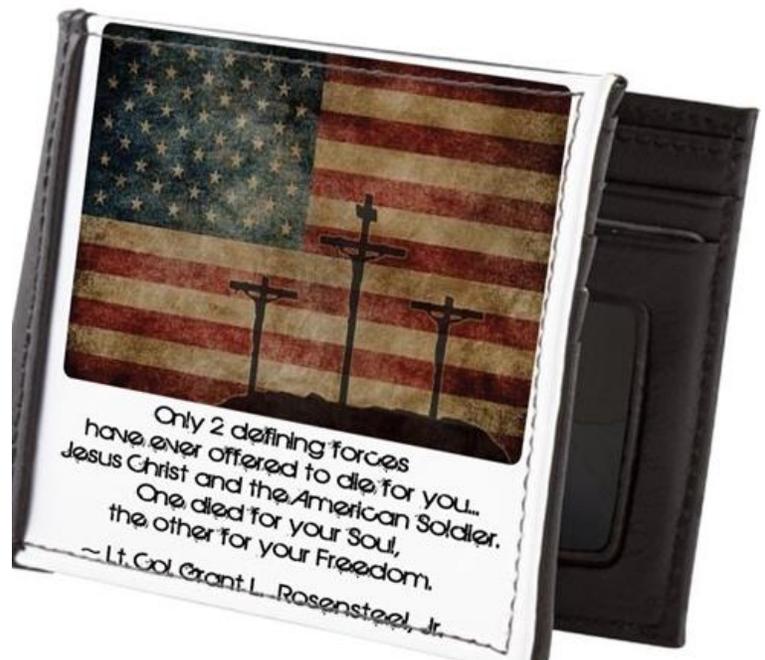
I/We understand that all I/we have is a gift from God.

In joyful thanks, I/we join with the 5th Avenue UMC Family & Friends to offer this generous financial gift.

Especially this year, encourage Me to grow into my faithful practice of financial stewardship.

I/We know that through God these Thanksgiving gifts will support and grow our ministry in the year ahead.

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