

# How to Enjoy Life Revisited

📖 Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

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We're toward the end of the third section of Ecclesiastes. The first section is the Prologue in 1:1-11. This is where Solomon submits his two-fold theme of vanity, all is vanity, but qualifies it by saying, when life is lived under the sun, that is, when life is lived without respect to God. So the thesis statement of Ecclesiastes is that *life is ultimately meaningless and empty when you live life as if God is not there*. The second section is the Experiments in 1:12-2:26. This is where Solomon reported his experiments living life under the sun. He tried everything possible: riches, projects, pleasure, drunkenness, moderated drunkenness, parties, solace, intellectual exercise, every nuance, every complexion and he concluded that *life is ultimately meaningless and empty when you live life as if God is not there*. The third section is the Observations in 3:1-5:20. This is where Solomon reported his observations of other people living life under the sun. He observed that people knew God was there and ordering their lives, but that they did not recognize Him and give thanks. Because of their emptiness, they tried to fill their lives with things they thought could take His place and bring satisfaction. Some pursued power at the expense of justice. Others used innovation at the expense of giving. Others pursued laziness at the expense of their own lives. Still others pursued work, but at the expense of rest and enjoyment. Some pursued solace, hoping to find fulfillment in themselves, but they sacrificed friendship. Some realized that this didn't bring satisfaction, that there was always a tradeoff, so they tried to add God to the equation, hoping to increase their wealth and find happiness. They went through ritual worship, but God will not be mocked; they suffered economic loss rather than gain. Others thought they could protect their wealth, but found that covetousness for more ate them alive, freeloaders continued to eat away at their fortunes and they were unable to sleep because of worry. And those that were unscathed by such things found that they lost mental stability because they realized that though they had a great fortune, they could take none of it with them when they died. Wiersbe said, "What he did in this section was demolish several of the myths that people hold about wealth. Because they hold to these illusions, they rob themselves of the blessings God has for them."<sup>1</sup> In the end, Solomon once more proved his thesis that *life is ultimately meaningless and empty when you live life as if God is not there*. You simply cannot get satisfaction and meaning from booze, parties, money, sex, business, projects, laziness, independence, academia, power, etc... All those things have diminishing returns, such that at first they give satisfaction, but then they require more intense involvement to get the same satisfaction, and this goes on and on until you

destroy yourself. It's a very sad picture. And when you're young you can't see that far. You think that would never happen to me. I can provide my own meaning and happiness apart from God. All I need is the right job, the right car, the right spouse, the right friends, the right social status, etc...etc...and then you come to the end of your life and you are empty. I think that's why we see so many older people who are just as cynical as they can be. They hate life. And friend, that is where you are going if you are on a track of living life without God. You simply will not and cannot get ultimate satisfaction, because that is only available when you put God at the center of your life and activities. It's not saying you can't have money or things or power or academia, it's just saying you can't get fulfillment out of them without God at the center of them. But the problem is that people want all that on their own terms. They want to be able to create fulfillment for themselves, create their own little paradise or room where they are god. And that's why this is such a futile journey and I hope you learn from this book that it will never work. God is still God and He won't let you have that private paradise. You live in His world and you have to live according to His terms or suffer the consequences.

Now, we come to the end of the third section, Solomon's observations. And these are Solomon's conclusions. After he experimented with life without God and observed others living without God he came back to God and walked with Him again right at the end of his life. So at the end of each section he will explain the right perspective. And you'll see he doesn't throw out the work or the wealth or things like that, but what he will do for us is put them in their right context, so we see how to live life down here in this crazy world, but with respect to God, so our lives take on meaning and significance. I think that believers are able to enjoy a quality of life that no one on earth can. It's the exclusive domain of believers to have access to this life. It's why Jesus said in John, "I have come that you may have life, and you may have it abundantly." The abundant life is the enjoyment of a high quality of life and that is the exclusive benefit of those who have eternal life. So friend, God has a many great blessings available for you. But you have to accept that they are hidden exclusively in Him and you can't go around Him to get to them. And that's where our struggle is.

So tonight in Eccl 5:18-20 Solomon gives us the positive side of how to live life under the sun but have a quality of life that is beyond the sun, where true satisfaction is found. Verse 18, **Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward.** You'll notice he qualified this enjoyment of life by saying **which God has given him.** This is the man who recognizes that enjoyment comes exclusively from God. He appreciates that what he has, has been given to him by God. So this is not every man. This is only the man who is walking with God at the center.

Now by saying this **is what I have seen** Solomon is simply telling us his conclusion to all his observations. And what he had concluded was that it is **good and fitting** to enjoy life as it comes to you from the hand of God. The word **good** means "beneficial." So enjoying life is a beneficial thing. Some Christians are so uptight. They couldn't enjoy life in any context, because they are prudish, super holy, idiots. They are not fooling anyone but

themselves. Life can be enjoyed. I think that is not taught enough from our pulpits. I think pastors are afraid to say that. What they are afraid of is their people will run off and live in sin. But, of course, that is no way to enjoy life. So that is not what I am saying. I am simply saying that it is beneficial or good for us to enjoy life, even though we live in a sinful world. The second word **fitting** means “appropriate” or “suitable. It is “appropriate” for us to enjoy life. It really is fitting. I know that blows some Christian’s minds away, and non-Christians for sure. They think if they become a Christian they now have to become a pious prude, that it means they can’t have any fun anymore. They say I’ll become a Christian later in life, after I’ve experimented with everything else. What they will really do is destroy themselves. They are not understanding, and Christians are not understanding, that enjoyment of life is actually the exclusive benefit of Christians. That doesn’t mean that all Christians are enjoying life. Solomon wasn’t enjoying life when he was living like a pagan, but it still is the exclusive benefit of a Christian. It’s only enjoyed when they put God at the center of everything. So Solomon came to this remarkable conclusion that hardly anyone, Christian or non-Christian understands or accepts today; that it is beneficial and fitting for a believer to enjoy life, and that really this enjoyment is exclusively available to believers.

Now, what follows is Solomon’s description of enjoying life. **To eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one’s labor in which he toils under the sun.** Eating and drinking are not talking about gluttony and drunkenness. They are Solomon’s way of saying enjoy life, relax. Eating and drinking are times of joy and relaxation. They are times you can sit back and relax and have fellowship with others. How many times at family gatherings is everyone in the kitchen, eating and laughing and talking? There’s a reason for that. Food, drink and fellowship go hand-in-hand. In fact, it’s why God in the beginning would come into the garden full of food and drink to fellowship with Adam and Eve. It’s why in the future new heaven and new earth God will dwell with us around a tree of life where there is eating and drinking. They are expressions of fellowship and joy and rest! So we should make every effort to protect dinnertime every day. That time is very special because it is a time of rest, or should be, and a time to catch up with everyone and to laugh. Unfortunately, today, in our individualistic society, everyone is running around like chickens with their heads cut off. Johnny has to get to soccer practice and Suzy has to get to violin lessons. So they rush off to the drive-thru, slam some food down, get home at 9 o’clock and crash. No time is taken to sit down as a family, relax, enjoy a meal together and catch up. They are bereft of this time of joy.

Further, Solomon says, **and enjoy oneself in all one’s labor.** This is your job. Very few people find enjoyment in their job. It doesn’t matter what the job is. It could be at home, it could be at the business, it could be the teacher, it could be the janitor, a lawyer, it doesn’t matter. Most people look at their job as something they have to do, not something they get to do. Therefore, they don’t enjoy themselves in their jobs. Give me a break! But this phrase says more. The words **enjoy oneself** means “find” or “see enjoyment.” The implication is that you have to actually search for some good thing that came out of your labor. He’s saying it’s beneficial and fitting that you should see some good to all those hours you are putting in. The reason it’s good is because when you see something good you did it fortifies your sense of well-being. It’s good to be able to look at something you

have done and say, "That's good!" And the reason we are like this is because we are made in the image and likeness of God. That means we reflect Him. That doesn't mean we're little versions of Him. We're not little gods. What we are is created analogous to Him. So that if God has an infinite quality, we have a finite version of that quality. So because God evaluated His labor in creation week and said, "It is good," when He created us in His own image and likeness it means that when we labor it is beneficial for us to be able to look at it and say, "It is good." So I think if we can just find one thing in our work day that is good and dwell on that, that's what Solomon is saying. But this is hard to do. Most days you work 9 or 10 hours and you find that a lot of it is unproductive or there are people that did idiot things that messed it all up, so there is not much good that comes out of it. But that's why the Hebrew says "find enjoyment." You have to search for it. You can't just expect it to be the first thing on your mind. The first thing on your mind is everything that went wrong. That's when you walk in the door and someone says, "How was your day?" and you shrug your shoulders and say, "It was ok," and then mention some bad thing that happened. It's not easy to find the good. What we have to do is discipline ourselves to find something good so that when we walk in the door and that question comes we immediately say some good thing. I think that will change the whole dynamic in a household. I think that your body language and what you say is determinative of the quality of life you are enjoying in the home. And that if you can't find the good then you won't be able to sit down and enjoy a meal and relax. But if you can, it will change your whole life.

Now you see that he is talking about life in a fallen world because he says in verse 18 **one's labor in which he toils**. It's toilsome because we live in a fallen world. The word **toil** means "exert oneself." It means your job is going to be difficult. In the Bible the woman's job is primarily in the home, having and raising a family. That's going to be difficult. The man's job is in the workplace, usually agriculture in the Bible, but now in the industrial complex somewhere. That's going to be difficult. It requires great toil. It has not always been that way. Before the fall of man labor was not toilsome, but there was labor. Some Christians here have told me that work was part of the curse. That is a bunch of baloney. Work is not a curse. Toil added to the work is the curse. Originally, work was the mandate of Adam and Eve, to cultivate and keep the garden. The difference for them was not work, but the fact that when they worked it didn't require much effort to get tremendous productivity. Now after the fall God cursed the ground so that our labor would be toilsome. Now we have to exert ourselves tremendously just to squeeze out a little product. I think that's one of the most frustrating things in the world. And I think that's why we struggle to find something good. So Solomon is saying, I know life looks like a dark canvass, but if you have the right perspective you can find a pinprick of light. It may take time and thought, but you can find it. Think of how hard and frustrating it is to find something you've lost. You look here, you look there, you've basically walked 20 miles in your own house trying to find it. Nobody said it was going to be easy. That's how difficult it is to find something good in your labor. But that's what you've got to find, because if you don't you've just missed out on all the satisfaction you can have in this life.

Now all this **toil**, Solomon says, is for **the few years of life which God has given**. Notice that the man recognizes that the few years are the gift of God. Do you look at your few years as the gift of God, or as what you have to go through? Where the English says **years**, the Hebrew says “days.” Think about that! The “few days of life which God has given you.” That’s all your life is, just a few days, really, in the grand scheme of things. What are you doing with those few days? When I went to Israel in 2006 we were in Bethlehem before it was overrun by Palestinians and became too dangerous. At the Church of the Nativity there was a statue of Jerome, one of the Early Church Fathers. He had lived and studied in Bethlehem. At his foot you see something peculiar, a skull. Actually, it’s under his foot. What’s the meaning of the skull under the foot? That life is short. That was a common symbol in the ancient world. It means don’t forget that you don’t have much time to live. You only have a few days and then you die. That’s what Solomon is saying. God has only given you a few days. I hope you are not wasting those days. I hope you are taking in each one of them; realizing that each one is the gift of God. Even the trials are given to you by God! Paul said in Eph 5:15, “be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time.” The Greek for “making the most of” could be translated “redeeming” or “buying up the time.” It means make the most of your time. In the context he’s talking about how we live our lives and he goes on to tell us in v 18 that the way to make the most of your time is to be filled by means of the Spirit. Friends, that’s the only way you’re going to be able to find any enjoyment in life. The money, the projects, the sex, the phones, the TV will not give you lasting enjoyment. Living by the Spirit is living life beyond the sun, it’s living with God at the center of your life. And when you’re doing that it is manifested by encouraging others, building up others, having joy in your heart, giving thanks for all things and deferring to others, putting them ahead of yourself. You don’t have many days to do that, but each day is a gift of God, so make the most of each one. And find something good each day and set your mind on it and tell it to someone else and sit down, eat, drink, relax and laugh.

Solomon says at the end of verse 18, **this is his reward**. By reward Solomon is not talking about eternal reward, he’s talking about reward in this life, the amount you receive from your hard work. It’s appropriate that you enjoy it. It’s your lot, it’s your share in life. God has given it to you. That’s the main perspective you have to have. What you have is what God has given you. If you have that perspective, then you can enjoy it. If not, forget it. The next section in Eccl 6 will show the man whom God gives a lot of wealth, but he doesn’t put God at the center of the wealth, is deprived of the enjoyment. Here’s what you have to do to enjoy wealth: give thanks to God for giving it to you. You know what gets in the way of this? Thinking that you deserve it. If you think that way, then you are destined to a life of frustration. God is the one who has given it to you. You say, but I worked for it. Yeah, I know, but did you make your hands? Did you make your brain? Did you give yourself the talents and abilities you have? No. Those were all given to you by God. And not only that, but He ordered your life so that you could use those talents and hands and brain to do what you do. They are the gift of God. A **reward** for you. So give thanks. That’s verse 18.

Now in 5:19 Solomon says, **Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.** This is a little confusing the way it's translated, because in 6:2 it says the opposite. "a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires; yet God has not empowered him to eat from them, for a foreigner enjoys them." So which is it? Does God empower the man he has given wealth to enjoy it, or not? The problem is in the word **empower**. This word should really be translated ability. God has also given him the ability to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor, not that he necessarily will. Since the only way to actually enjoy them is to regard them as **the gift of God**, then only those whom God has given wealth and gives thanks to Him enjoy them. This is just another way of saying that enjoyment of wealth is only from God and that enjoyment is cut off by the giver of the wealth for those who don't acknowledge Him. The next chapter deals with those who God gives wealth but no thanks and all the frustrations and ills they suffer. Wiersbe said, "To him [Solomon], it was a basic principle that nobody can truly enjoy the gifts of God apart from the God who gives the gifts. To enjoy the gifts without the Giver is idolatry, and this can never satisfy the human heart."<sup>2</sup> Solomon is the perfect person to say this because God gave him great wealth and he both walked with God and away from God. He was on both sides of the fence. And he found that the ability to enjoy wealth is there, but it's only enjoyed by those who acknowledge it as **the gift of God**. I think what Wiersbe said here is so important I'll quote it. "If we focus more on the gifts than on the Giver, we are guilty of idolatry. If we accept His gifts, but complain about them, we are guilty of ingratitude. If we hoard His gifts and will not share them with others, we are guilty of indulgence. But if we yield to His will and use what He gives us for His glory, then we can enjoy life and be satisfied."<sup>3</sup> Friend, there is a way to enjoy life, but only when He is at the heart of it. You simply cannot have your own private playground. He won't let you have it.

In 5:20 he concludes this section saying, **For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.** You know what this is saying? There are people that you meet that all they talk about is the past, the glory days. These are usually the days of their youth, when they were young. You know the reason that's all they talk about? Because their life sucks now. They don't want to talk about their life now. All they have is the past because every day now is just a drudgery. The reason it's that way is because they don't have God at the center of their life. They can't find any good in their life. I think this is a very common path people are walking down. They look at life as if enjoyment is dependent on beauty, youth, sports, popularity, promise, etc...rather than upon God. But when a man has God at the center that man is **occupied with the gladness of his heart** today! He's not dwelling on the past. He's not sitting there talking about all the glory days 80 years ago. He's talking about what he's occupied with today. The plan of God today and what God is doing with his life today. He's just enjoying each day as it comes. I think this is a brilliant perspective. I think this shatters any other way of living. But to get to this place you have to realize several things Solomon has taught us. First, that it is beneficial and fitting for you to enjoy life. If you can't accept that you can never get enjoyment. You'll close yourself off from it. God wants you to enjoy life. Accept that and smile. Second, find

something good in what you accomplish each day of your life and dwell on that. Don't whine and moan about all the bad things. Find one good thing and go with that! Third, acknowledge that each day of your life is a gift from God. Each day is not just what you have to go through. It is a gift, a present. I know many of us are not looking at each day that way. But each day is a gift of God. Are you acknowledging that? If you are you will find enjoyment each day. If not, you never will. This is revolutionary stuff here, very practical, very good stuff. Fourth, whatever you have, that is your reward. God has given it to you to enjoy. Give thanks to Him and enjoy it! Fifth, if you do those four things, then verse 20 will be true for you as you grow older. You won't be living in the old glory days, telling stories about when you were a young whippersnapper. You'll be too occupied living life that day. Being busy with the things that God has you here for today. That's a tremendous perspective and a true way to enjoy life as it comes to you from the hand of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 67.

<sup>2</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 74.

<sup>3</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 71.