

Life without Satisfaction and Ten Lessons to Life with Satisfaction

 Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

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Last time we looked at Ecclesiastes 5:18-20. This is the conclusion to the third section of the book, which begins in 3:1 and ends in 5:20, and records Solomon's observations of other people living life under the sun. In this section he basically showed over and over that life is ultimately meaningless and empty when you live as if God is not there. So his conclusion to the matter is to live life as if God is there, to live as if life is a gift of God and to enjoy it and accept it from Him as a reward. So this section I titled "How to Enjoy Life." And it really is a tremendous perspective. In 5:18 he says "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting; to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor." He finds two things to be good and fitting for us as humans; one is "to eat, to drink." This was a common idiom for enjoying the fruit of one's labor. It includes literal food and drink, of course, but it goes further than food and drink; referring to all the fruit of one's labor. And his point is that it is good and fitting for us to enjoy it. Two is to "enjoy oneself in all one's labor." The word "enjoy oneself" should be translated "find good." The point is to look for something good that comes out of each day. This is something you have to search for because there's so much bad in a day that it tends to stamp out the good. And then we are told that this labor is that "in which he toils under the sun during the few days of his life which God has given him." In other words, the labor is toilsome in a fallen world. Getting good production doesn't come easy. It takes a lot of effort. But the man who recognizes that this life is the gift of God can find the good and enjoy the fruits of his labor because he recognizes it as a reward from God.

In 5:19, Solomon added something more. "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 strange verse because we know there are people whom God has given riches and wealth and they don't get to eat from them. So we said, the word "empowered" should be translated "ability." God has also given wealthy men the ability to eat from them, that is, find enjoyment, but it's not true that all men do. Only those who recognize that life is a gift of God actually do. The principle that Solomon is laying down is that no one can enjoy wealth apart from the God who gives the wealth. He simply will not allow it to be enjoyed. But it can be enjoyed by the man who recognizes it as the reward of God.

In 5:20 Solomon says something interesting about the man with this perspective; “he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.” In other words, this man realizes that each day is a gift of God and so they don’t dwell on the glory days. They aren’t constantly living in 1968. They are living today because they know that God has a plan and a purpose for their lives. And each day is lived with that perspective. So they are busy living now. A brilliant perspective that is not often seen.

We came to some conclusions and they’re so important I want to review these before we move on to Eccl 6. First, 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. Open up to the idea that 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. 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. You’ll be too occupied living life today, staying busy with the things that God has for you today. It’s a tremendous perspective on life and the only way to enjoy life as it comes to you from the hand of God.

Today we come to Ecclesiastes 6 and we’ll work with verses 1-12 tonight. Verses 1-2 speak of the vanity of wealth without enjoyment. Verses 3-6 the vanity of great blessing without enjoyment. And verses 7-12 give some concluding lessons about the vanity of life. So in verses 1-2 let’s look at the vanity of having great wealth but not being able to enjoy the wealth. Verse 1, **There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men— Solomon says this is an evil which** he has seen. That means he is continuing to make observations. Here is his report of some observations. What he observed is **an evil**. The Hebrew can be translated that way, but it’s probably better to translate it “misfortune.” He observed a misfortune and this was a misfortune for those **under the sun**, that is, those who lived as if God is not there. This is the opposite of the man in 5:18-20 who lived as if God is there and who gave thanks to God for all he had. That man enjoyed a blessed life. But that is not the normal case. Most men fit in this category of misfortune. He says **it is prevalent among men**, meaning “it is common.” But again the translation is weak. The word translated **prevalent** basically means “great,” which is why they came to the word common, but it is more likely a word which refers to weight. It should be translated something like, it is weighty upon men, as in a great burden weighing upon men. Now when he says **men** it is not just talking about **men** in general, it’s talking about “mankind,” the human race. The Hebrew word is *adam* and *adam* was both a man and mankind at the same time. He sinned as a man but we sinned in him as mankind. And Solomon is saying that this misfortune weighs heavily upon the portion of mankind that is living life as if God is not there.

Now what is it that weighs heavily upon them? Verse 2, **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. This is vanity and a severe affliction. Now you would think that **a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor** would naturally have enjoyment, that it would be a natural byproduct. But this man does not get enjoyment. And the reason is stated. **God has not empowered him to** enjoy them. For some reason God gave Him the riches but wouldn't let Him enjoy the riches. For some reason God gave him an honored place in society but He would not let Him enjoy the honored place in society. The question is why? Why would God give something to someone but not let them enjoy it? Very simple. They did not give thanks to God. They did not put Him at the center of their lives. They accepted the gifts but did not give honor to the Gift-Giver. And that is a very grave sin. And here is a great lesson. God can give you great riches, wealth and an esteemed place in society, and you may think that it will naturally give satisfaction, but that is not the case. God is also the one who gives you the enjoyment of it. But He conditions that enjoyment on giving Him honor and thanks, recognizing Him as the Gift-Giver. That is a fundamental principle of Solomon that he will come back to over and over and over. Now why they won't give Him the recognition He deserves is because they are sinners, and what they want is to be able to create their own happiness. They don't want to have to recognize Him in order to get it. They would rather have their own private playground where they can dictate the rules of their world and receive the recognition that belongs only to God. So they want the wealth. Who doesn't want wealth? And God has given it to them. But they don't want to recognize that God has given it to them. And note just how much God gave this man. **riches, wealth and honor so that his soul, or person, lacks nothing of all that he desires.** This man does not lack anything that he wants. He thought all these things would make him happy. But **God has not empowered him to eat from them.** The reason is because the happiness does not come from the riches, wealth and honor, but from the God who gave them. He's the only way to get enjoyment out of the things. Wiersbe said, "How fortunate a person would be to lack nothing, but how miserable if he or she could not enjoy the blessings of life."¹ This is the misfortune Solomon spoke about in verse 1. Riches and wealth and esteem but no enjoyment out of it. It's a very miserable life.

Now we know why he could not enjoy them. God did not enable him to enjoy them. But we're not told the circumstances that caused him not to be able to enjoy them. In other words, we're not told what happened that caused his riches and wealth and honor to go to another. He may have had marital problems and she sued him for all he was worth and won. He may have become sick and not been able to eat many foods. He may have made a bad investment and someone else got all his money. He may have died suddenly and the whole estate went to someone else. But those are just the circumstances. The real reason the man could not enjoy them is because God withheld the enjoyment. And the only way to remedy that is to give thanks to the God who gave them and recognize Him as the Gift-Giver. But instead we see misfortune, a man with everything in the world and no enjoyment, but instead **a foreigner enjoys them.** This, he says, is a great **vanity and a severe affliction.** It's like having 10 millions of dollars and a very esteemed place in society and yet your entire existence is misery and someone else gets to enjoy it? Wiersbe said, "More than one person has worked hard and looked forward to a comfortable retirement only to have a heart attack and become either an invalid or a statistic. Or perhaps the

peace of retirement is shattered by a crisis in the family that begins to drain both money and strength. Why do these things happen?"² Well, they happen because the person did not recognize that the giver of the gifts is also the giver of joy. They did not place God at the center of it.

Now that is one thing that is a heavy affliction upon man. In verse 3 Solomon states another, this time the vanity of having great blessing from God but no enjoyment. It's a hypothetical. He does not say he saw this, but he says, **If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, "Better the miscarriage than he, for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity."** In other words, here is a man who is extremely blessed. He has **a hundred children and lives many years**. These were signs of blessing to the Jewish people. And clearly hyperbole is being used here, because this man **fathered a hundred children**. Not many men father **a hundred children**. A few did, Solomon who had seven hundred wives must have had hundreds of children. Rehoboam had eighteen wives and eighty-eight children. But most men do not. It seems clear Solomon is using hyperbole, exaggeration in order to paint a picture of extreme blessing. As Wiersbe said, "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."³ Now someone might say that a chance at life is at least better than no chance. But I think that misses Solomon's point. His point is a hypothetical one. Consider having such great blessing from God but you're every moment truly is misery. You find no satisfaction at all with any of the blessing. Then, in that case, **"Better the miscarriage than he, for it [the fetus] comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity. It never sees the sun and it never knows anything; it is better off than he."** You see, at least the fetus did not have to live a long life of misery. It comes in **futility and goes into obscurity**, it's forgotten. **And its name is covered in obscurity**. The Hebrews never named a miscarried child, instead they waited to name the child until the 8th day. That way it was easier to forget the **miscarriage**, a very troubling thing. But this child had no name and so it **goes into obscurity**. It also **never saw the sun and never knew any** of the evil of this world. So then, the child **is better off than he**. This final phrase means "has more rest than he." The child has more rest than the man who fathered a hundred children and lived a long life because he never had to go through all the misery.

In verse 6 Solomon goes further. **Even if the other man lives a thousand years twice and does not enjoy good things—do not all go to one place?** In other words, even if the man lives twice the life of Methuselah, two millennia, and for two thousand years he does not enjoy one good thing, guess what? He goes to the same place that the miscarried child goes. It's just that the miscarried child has it better because he never had to go through two-thousand years of misery. And what is the **one place** they both go? To Sheol, which is the grave. They both go to the grave. So who has it better? The miscarriage. I would even go further than Solomon, because I believe that if the man envisioned here is an unbeliever, that the miscarried child has it infinitely better, because I believe him to be with God. That is what I thought about the two year old that died a few weeks ago, when all the balloons were placed around town. I thought, that is hard for the mother and father, but

it is good for the child, because I'm not sure that child would ever have heard the gospel knowing some of his circumstances. But now I have assurance that he is in the presence of God, infant salvation.

So, having seen the vanity of wealth without enjoyment in vv 1-2 and the vanity of great blessing without enjoyment in vv 3-6, with the main lesson there being to put God at the center of wealth and blessing, we now come to some concluding lessons about the vanity of life in verses 7-12; ten lessons to be exact. There are ten lessons here that we can take with us so that we don't suffer affliction. First, verse 7, **All a man's labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied.** What does this mean? Does this simply mean a man works for food but never has enough. No. This is about materialism. This is about working and working and working in order to satisfy your appetite to have more things and finding out that you are never **satisfied**. So, the first lesson is that we must realize that we cannot be satisfied by the temporal and the material. This is a difficult lesson to accept because we want to be able to find satisfaction on our own terms. So what we try to do is buy things that will make us happy. Then that happiness wears off and so we buy something else to make us happy again. And this goes on and on and on. The problem is that God has set eternity in men's hearts, a gaping hole in man's heart that can only be filled by something eternal. So when you are trying to fill that hole with things that are temporal and material, no matter how many things you put in that hole, you can never fill it. The NT says, "man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." That means that we need spiritual truth from an eternal God to fill that hole. He's the only one that can satisfy. And I assure you that if you try to get satisfaction and joy apart from Him at the center, first and foremost, you will never get it. You will just move from one thing to another. Solomon's advice to you is to get in the word of God, put your relationship with Him first and foremost. Those material things will then be in their proper place and God will give you a little enjoyment out of them. But your true enjoyment will be Him. So the first lesson is that we must realize that we cannot be satisfied by the temporal and the material, only by the eternal and the spiritual.

The second lesson, verse 8a, **For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool?** The **wise man** here is not **wise** in divine view point, but in human view point. He is hoping that intellectual pursuit on its own terms, apart from God, will satisfy. But the lesson is that we must realize that we cannot be satisfied by intellectual pursuits. Some think that because they are smart and did well in school, excelling beyond most of their classmates, that intellect is their path to satisfaction. They may learn more than fools who never crack a book, but there is no ultimate advantage for them over the fool. They both go down to the grave. They both will be forgotten. Intellectual pursuits are finite; they cannot fill the infinite hole in man's heart. Only an eternal God can do that. If you apply your intellect to the pursuit of the knowledge of God, then the results will be starkly different. Then you will find true satisfaction because true satisfaction is only found in knowing Him! So the second lesson is that we must realize that we cannot be satisfied by intellectual pursuits apart from God.

The third lesson, verse 8b, **What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?** The last phrase, **knowing how to walk before the living**, should probably be translated, "knowing how

to conduct oneself before the living.” That is, they know how to get along in life despite being **poor**. They are content with what they have and not always trying to get something more. While that’s a good way to live, what advantage does that man have over being wealthy? He’s still going to die. He still doesn’t have ultimate satisfaction. The lesson here is that we must realize that our life does not consist of the things we possess. You are not defined by what you possess. That is a great flaw in man’s thinking. How many of us slip into thinking that wealth translates into importance; poverty into worthlessness. We forget that man looks on the outside, but God looks at the heart. What you see is not what you get. That is a myth. What you see is what you see and that is all. It’s what you don’t see that counts. How arrogant for us to judge from what we see, as if external appearances translate into value. That’s very much not the case. God looks at what we are on the inside. That is what is interesting to Him. So the lesson here is that we must realize that our life does not consist of the things we possess, but how God looks at us.

The fourth lesson, verse 9, **What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires**. This is a simple lesson; we must realize that if we are content with what we have we are better off than if we are constantly wanting more. It is a very difficult thing to be content with what you have. Very few people ever find contentedness. But this only betrays the deeper problem of thinking that we can find satisfaction in having more, which points us back to lesson one; we cannot be satisfied by the temporal and material. The only thing that can satisfy is eternal and spiritual. So if you can be content with what you already see, the things you have now, you are better off than having that constant itch to have more. Unger said, “He who is content is happier with ever so little than the discontented with ever so much.” Lastly Solomon says in verse 9b, **This too is futility and striving after the wind**. He’s only repeating what he has said before, wanting more and more and more is just vanity and you are chasing your tail, chasing the wind, trying to get something you can never have, simply because once you get it you find that what you hoped it would do, give you satisfaction, it could not do. Only God can do that. Only a close relationship with the infinite, eternal God.

The fifth lesson, verse 10a, **Whatever exists has already been named**. In other words, the things that are in existence were laid out beforehand in the plan of God. Put shortly, your lot in life is determined beforehand by God. He is the one who established your circumstances. You have to decide how to respond to those circumstances. So the fifth lesson is that we must realize that our lot in life is already decided by God and we can’t change that, all we can do is respond to Him appropriately. Many believers struggle to accept their lot in life. They will fight against God their whole life to change it. They simply cannot accept the life God has given them. And because of it they have a horrible life. The horrible life is not due to the circumstances God gave them, but to their response to God. I have come to the conclusion that I don’t care who you are, what station of life you are in, what job you have, or who you are married too, you can enjoy life if you accept your lot in life and give thanks to Him. It’s that simple. You decide by your response to Him, how enjoyable or unenjoyable your life will be. If you respond favorably, He will give you joy; if you moan and groan and throw a fit then He’ll withhold joy. **Whatever exists has already been named**.

The sixth lesson, verse 10b, **And it is known what man is.** So I ask you, **what is man?** Man is a fallen creature. We must come to grips with this. This is the lesson; we must realize that we are fallen creatures. That means we are never to forget that we are the creature and that He is the Creator; that we are fallen sinners and that He is holy and perfect. The Creator-creature distinction is always intact. But add to that in this present age that we are fallen and that means that we are capable of very horrible things. Let us not forget that. Ps 9:20, Put them in fear, O Lord; Let the nations know that they are but men." Keep that forever in your mind's eye. **It is known what man is.**

The seventh lesson, verse 10c, **for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is.** That is, man cannot argue with God because God is stronger than man. How are you a mere creature, going to dispute with Him the Creator. That is not a contest. And to do so is to commit the sin of presumption; taking the liberty of claiming to know better than God and to stand in judgment over Him. You have no right to charge Him with causing your life to be the way it is. Even though He is the One who set up the circumstances of your life, it is you who ruin your life by disputing with Him about it rather than giving thanks to Him for it. So this lesson is that we must realize that you, a creature, cannot argue with God about your life.

The eighth lesson, verse 11, **For there are many words which increase futility. What then is the advantage to a man?** In this one the man is disputing with God. There are many words that this man uses in his argument. But the more he says the more futility. The lesson is that we must realize it is worthless to argue with God. You can stand there all day long and argue with God about why He made your life like this and why this was in your life and why that was in your life, but in the end, it was in your life, and it is pointless to argue with Him about it. Just accept it and give thanks. That's the hard part, give thanks. But that's the only way. God has a reason; God has a purpose. He just won't show it to you. That's our big hang-up as people. Before we thank God for whatever it is, we want Him to show us what the good is going to be. We want Him to show us the future so after we see where it's going we sign off on it and say, "Alright God, thanks." But He's not going to show you where it's going. He wants you to just live by faith. He wants you to trust Him. He wants you to believe that He is good and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. So to just go on and on arguing with God about this bad thing in your life and that bad thing is just a waste of time. You are only digging yourself a deeper pit. You are only making your life worse. I remember one bible teacher saying in James 1, "You know what the quickest way out of a trial is?" Giving thanks to God. Yet that is so counter to the way we think. We aren't going to give thanks for some horrible thing. Well, you can decide how you are going to respond. But I am going to tell you the truth. Until you give thanks you will just keep suffering. It's your fault. And until you accept that you will never be able to get out of that pit. Spilling many words arguing with God is just a waste of time. It gives you no advantage and is actually to your detriment.

The ninth lesson, verse 12, **For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life?** See, that right there is what I was just telling you about. How do you know what's good? Do

you think Joseph thought it was good that his brothers sold him into slavery to the Midianites? Do you think Joseph thought it was good when he was thrown in prison for two years for no cause? Here was a man who did not know what was good for him during his lifetime. But in the end he said, "What you meant for evil, God meant for good, the saving of many people alive." So you don't know what ultimate good God wants to bring about **during** your lifetime. But it may involve a lot of tough circumstances along the way to get there and see. But it's that very reason that people conclude that life is just futile. I mean, what is the point? Well, there is a point, people just don't trust that God is working all things together for good. If they did they'd have a better attitude. They'd give thanks for the hard things. What's the lesson here? We must realize that we are limited in our evaluation of what is good in our lifetime. We simply can't see far enough to know what good purpose God has for our lives, but there is one!

And the tenth lesson, verse 12b, **For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?** This somewhat goes with what was prior. Nobody can tell you what is going to happen to you for the rest of your life. People don't like that idea. They'd like to be able to map it out themselves. But you can't do that. You have an idea in your mind but it never works out that way. So what is the lesson? We must realize that from our perspective our lives are uncertain. You really don't know what is coming tomorrow. That is such an uncomfortable thought. Or is it? If God is good and God is in control and God has ordered a set of circumstances around your life that is moving toward some ultimate good, what are you uncomfortable about? See, we shouldn't be uncomfortable not knowing what's going to happen tomorrow, because we know the One who holds the future. But if you're just living life **under the sun**, as the man here in this verse, who knows? Everything is chance and there is no purpose.

So what can we conclude. First, in v 1 Solomon says he observed a misfortune that is experienced by those living without God, that is a great burden to them. Verse 2 is that great burden, how God could give someone great wealth and yet they get no enjoyment out of the wealth but someone else gets to enjoy it? The reason is because the person God gave the wealth doesn't thank the God who gave the wealth. In verses 3-6 another misfortune which is a burden on man is that a man has great blessing but then gets no enjoyment out of the blessing. Solomon says it's better to be miscarried than to be that man, to just never come into this world and never see the light of the sun. It's even better than living twice as long as Methuselah, because a life of total misery is worse than no life at all. Finally, in verses 7-12 Solomon gives us ten lessons. First, verse 7, temporal and material things will never satisfy you. Second, verse 8a, intellectual pursuits apart from God will never satisfy you. Third, verse 8b, your life does not consist of what you possess. Fourth, verse 9, it's better to be content with what you have than to always be wanting more. Fifth, verse 10a, your circumstances are already determined by God. What you do with them will determine your quality of life. Sixth, verse 10b, man is a fallen creature, don't ever forget that. Seventh, verse 10c, the creature cannot contend with the Creator. Eighth, verse 11, arguing with God about your life is to your own detriment. Ninth, verse 12a, you don't know what ultimate good God is accomplishing with your life. Tenth, verse 12b, you can't see what's coming in the future. But the important

thing is to respond by saying, "But I do know who holds the future, and that He is good, and that even through all the troubles and difficulties of living in a fallen world, He is working my life together for good." That is the way to live life.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 75.

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

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 75.