

What does God say about Over-indulgers & Under-enjoyers?

Ecclesiastes 5; Mark 10 & 1 Timothy 6

Q&A

1. What does God say about over-indulgers & under-enjoyers? Deny self & live abundantly.

No one obscure part of God's Word ever will negate the clear and powerful passages. God has already clearly said that He desires us to: walk in the Spirit, not live fleshly lives, not live for the lusts of flesh, eyes, and pride, and to take up our cross and die daily.

Yet He gave us all things richly to enjoy live more abundantly. So what is the balance?

What is Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, 8-17, 18-20 teaching us from God?

Who is Solomon?

Solomon as nearly no other person in history had the world at his feet. He was unsurpassed in education and knowledge (1:16); he was unbridled in his ability and desire to pursue and find pleasure (2:3); he was in the peak of worldly fame, popularity and prominence (2:4-6); he was possessor of uncountable wealth and possessions (2:8).

Solomon's Life Stages

Some have said that the three books Solomon wrote may have arisen from the three stages of his life.

- Song of Solomon from the young man in love.
- Proverbs from the wisdom of a mature man at his zenith. And
- Ecclesiastes from an old and bitter man looking back on his wasted opportunities. . .

Solomon's Wasted Life

With incredible Divine Blessings.

With personal visits from the God of Heaven.

With wisdom unsurpassed on the planet.

With wealth beyond the greatest kings of the Earth.

With wine, women and palatial living . . . nothing ever satisfied him.

The hands spread out to God in prayer were pulled back and instead grasped the idols of paganism.

The heart of zeal for the Living and True God became cold, distant and empty.

From this final era trickles ECCLESIASTES.

Ecclesiastes: Hear the Conclusion

After a life of pursuit of things, Solomon confesses with Christ that one may well gain the whole world and still lose his own soul (compare Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 with Matthew 16:26). Only in the Lord is there any hope for this life! We must meet that “One Shepherd” (12:11) who alone offers “abundant life” (John 10:9-10).

The Wisdom Literature from God

Remember we are in the fourth of the five Books of Hebrew Wisdom Literature. Each is a Divinely Inspired insight on a facet of life.

1. In JOB He is our Sure Redeemer. This book gives THE TRUTH FROM GOD ON SUFFERING.
2. In PSALMS He is our Shepherd. This book gives THE TRUTH FROM GOD ON WORSHIP.
3. In PROVERBS He is Wisdom Incarnate. This book gives THE TRUTH FROM GOD ON LIVING (principles not promises).
4. In ECCLESIASTES He is the only hope of contentment. This book gives THE TRUTH FROM GOD ON LIFE.
5. In SONG OF SOLOMON He is our Beloved. This book gives THE TRUTH FROM GOD ON LOVING.

Ecclesiastes is From God

God divinely inspired Solomon to record the truth of what it takes to have contentment in life as a believer. This is a philosophy of life for us as Christians. The Lord has given us revelation to help us govern our temporal lives on earth. He didn't leave us alone to try to come up with our own plan!

We might distill down the essential truths of these 12 chapters as being:

- LIFE APART FROM GOD IS VAIN.
- LIFE WITH GOD CAN BE VAIN IF CONTENTMENT IS NOT PRACTICED!

The key WORD of the book is “vanity” (37x) and the key phrase is “under the Sun” (only in this book; 28x); it means from an ‘earth is all there is’ perspective.

They are the basis of contented living as we see that life apart from the intervention of God is like breath that is transitory, vapor that is insubstantial and fleeting. The times that this book sounds wrong¹ it is because Solomon seeks to show what those who merely live life “Under the Sun” find it empty “vain”.

Wrong Philosophies for Finding Meaning in Life

Solomon shows in his life that satisfaction can never be found merely in:

1. HUMANISM (you are glorious so exalt yourself) **Ecclesiastes 1:4-18** this makes life a constant promotion of human dignity, personal worth and inherent value totally apart from the Lord. Mankind is in charge and by study and hard work we can continually better ourselves.
2. EPICUREANISM (life is a party, go for it) **Ecclesiastes 2:1-11** this makes life a chase for satisfying lust, which is impossible!
3. MATERIALISM (possessions can satisfy so get all you can get) **Ecclesiastes 2:12-26** this makes one’s worth based on things material not things eternal.
4. FATALISM (life is rigged, resign yourself and live passively) **Ecclesiastes 3:1-15** this life produces despair, resignation and cynicism.
5. DEISM (God is busy with other things, go it alone) **Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:16** this life produces detachedness, loneliness, and despair.
6. MERE RELIGION (live by man’s rules & man’s wisdom instead of God’s Word) **Ecclesiastes 5:1-8** this life has a form of godliness but denies the power
7. WEALTH (the more you have the more you want) **Ecclesiastes 5:9-6:12** this life is an endless chasing after stuff, status, and pleasures
8. MORALITY (try your best, do as much good as possible) **Ecclesiastes 7:1-12:12** this life is powerless in the presence of the ever growing wickedness of humanity.

What is Ecclesiastes 5 about?

Be Honest to God (Ecc. 5:1–7)

Be Honest to Others (Ecc. 5:8–9)

Be Honest to Yourself (Ecc. 5:10–20)

As I pondered Ecclesiastes, the 4th Wisdom book, I was deeply struck by a sermon one pastor presented on Ecclesiastes 5.10-15. Here were his points. See if they strike you like they struck me.

1. “Whoever loves money never has money enough” (v. 10). The more you have, the more you want.

¹ Scofield says that there is no revelation in this book, just accurately recorded words of Solomon.

2. “Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income” (v. 10). The more you have, the less you’re satisfied.
3. “As goods increase, so do those who consume them” (v.11). The more you have, the more people (including the government) will come after it.
4. “And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?” (v. 11). The more you have, the more you realize it does you no good.
5. “The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep” (v. 12). The more you have, the more you have to worry about.
6. “I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner” (v. 13). The more you have, the more you can hurt yourself by holding on to it.
7. “Or wealth lost through some misfortune” (v.14). The more you have, the more you have to lose.
8. “Naked a man comes from his mother’s womb, and as he comes, so he departs” (v.15a). The more you have, the more you’ll leave behind.
9. “He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand” (v.15b). The more you have, the more you can send ahead to Heaven.

Lessons from Ecclesiastes 5 for Contented Living

He who lays up treasures on earth spends his life backing away from his treasures. To him, death is loss. He who spends his life moving away from his treasures has reason to despair.

He who lays up treasures in heaven looks forward to eternity; he’s moving daily toward his treasures. To him, death is gain. He who spends his life moving toward his treasures has reason to rejoice.

Is the passing of time causing you and me to despair or rejoice? God's kingdom was the reference point for these men. They saw all else in light of the kingdom. They were compelled to live as they did not because they treasured no things, but because they treasured the right things.

We often miss something in missionary martyr Jim Elliot's famous words, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." We focus on his willingness to go to the mission field. That willingness started when he relinquished his hold on things as MINE!

Seven Keys To Promote & Protect Contentment from I Timothy 6

1. **Always remember things are only temporary.** 1 Timothy 6:7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.
2. **Only seek necessities, wait for the rest.** 1 Timothy 6:8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.
3. **Avoid a consuming desire for prosperity.** 1 Timothy 6:9-10 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.
4. **Flee materialism.** 1 Timothy 6:11 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.
5. **Cling to eternal life.** 1 Timothy 6:12, 15, 19 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 15 which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen. 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.
6. **Pin your hopes on God.** 1 Timothy 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. (I hope we have enough to...I hope that this investment will...I hope this job will last...)
7. **Give until it hurts.** 1 Timothy 6:18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,

2. **Is saving money showing a lack of faith? No, but obey the doctrines of stewardship.**

We are to give to God sacrificially, proportionately, and systematically through life, even in our abundant poverty. 2 Cor 8; 1 cor 16; cut your portion in seven

Beware of Over-indulgence, it leads to leanness of the soul Psalm 106

3. **What was Jesus saying to rich young ruler? Get saved**

Mark 10:17-22; 1 Tim 6/Ecclesiastes

The Doctrine of: Mankind and Labor

1. LABOR IS GOD'S GIFT TO US Ecclesiastes 2:10 Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. (NKJV)
Ecclesiastes 5:18 Here is what I have seen: [It is] good and fitting [for one] to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it [is] his heritage. (NKJV)
2. LABOR MUST BE ENJOYED Ecclesiastes 2:24 Nothing [is] better for a man [than] that he should eat and drink, and [that] his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. (NKJV)
3. LABOR IS HARD Ecclesiastes 2:23 For all his days [are] sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity. (NKJV)
4. LABOR IS TEMPORAL Ecclesiastes 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, But in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, So that man can find out nothing [that will come] after him. (NKJV) Ecclesiastes 1:5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, And hastens to the place where it arose. (NKJV) see also 3:1; 7:14
5. LABOR ALONE NEVER SATISFIES Ecclesiastes 5:10 He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also [is] vanity. (NKJV) Ecclesiastes 6:7 All the labor of man [is] for his mouth, And yet the soul is not satisfied. (NKJV) Ecclesiastes 10:8-9 He who digs a pit will fall into it, And whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent. 9 He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, [And] he who splits wood may be endangered by it. (NKJV)
6. EVEN OUR LABOR IS GUIDED BY GOD Ecclesiastes 9:11 I returned and saw under the sun that -- The race [is] not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all. (NKJV)

Chapter 9 gives us four conclusions to live by:

1. **Be contagiously, overflowingly happy by choice. Rise above circumstances by the fruit of the Spirit called joy!** Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat your bread with joy, And drink your wine with a merry heart; For God has already accepted your works. (NKJV)

2. **Be continually free of guilt and rid of its bondage as God's children. Be aware His forgiveness and approval.** Ecclesiastes 9:8 Let your garments always be white, And let your head lack no oil. (NKJV)
3. **Be constantly committed to God as a fearer in my personal life, married life, work life and so on.** Ecclesiastes 9:9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that [is] your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun. (NKJV)
4. **Be completely in gear throughout life by the power of the Holy Spirit live life to the max.** Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do [it] with your might; for [there is] no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going. (NKJV)

Self Life Is Futile, Christ Life Is Everything!

Frustration is produced by putting out gaze on self or circumstances instead of on the Lord! (Heb 12:2) When we look at self or the world around us it is depressing because both are not designed to last forever! Note in chapter 2 the personal pronoun "I" is used 36 times. This is much like Romans 7 where Paul describes the self-life struggle personally over 30 times. Then in Romans 8 life in the Holy Spirit almost erases Paul's self awareness.

The Doctrine of: Wisdom versus Folly

Ecclesiastes speaks of wisdom in a non-moral way. It is skillfulness, practicality and common sense. The advantage of wisdom is you are not foolish.

The Potential uses of Human Wisdom are:

- As a gift to God Ecclesiastes 2:26 For [God] gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who [is] good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to [him who is] good before God. This also [is] vanity and grasping for the wind. (NKJV) also 12.11
- Strengthens 2.19; preserves life 7.10-12; gives success 10.10; superior to weapons 9.13-18; superior to money 7.12; gives perception 2.14 and it is better than folly 7.4-5.
- Builds Moderation Ecclesiastes 7:16-17 Do not be overly righteous, Nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself? 17 Do not be overly wicked, Nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time? (NKJV) life is not to be extreme in human terms. This is not altering the God ordained mandates of righteousness. It is just in everything else we are to be regulated by moderation!
- Protects Reputation Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good name [is] better than precious ointment, And the day of death than the day of one's birth; (NKJV)
- Encourages Socialization Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Two [are] better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him [who is] alone when he falls, For [he has] no one to help him up. 11 Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm [alone?] 12 Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken. (NKJV)

- Protects one from Slandering Ecclesiastes 10:20 Do not curse the king, even in your thought; Do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; For a bird of the air may carry your voice, And a bird in flight may tell the matter. (NKJV)
- Encourages Fiscal Conservatism Ecclesiastes 11:2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, For you do not know what evil will be on the earth. (NKJV)

The Doctrine of: The limitations of Human Wisdom are:

1. ONLY GOD GIVES TRUE WISDOM Ecclesiastes 7:23-24 All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise"; But it [was] far from me. 24 As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, Who can find it out? (NKJV)
2. ONLY GOD REVEALS SPIRITUAL SECRETS Ecclesiastes 11:5 As you do not know what [is] the way of the wind, [Or] how the bones [grow] in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything. (NKJV)
3. ONLY GOD KNOWS THE FUTURE Ecclesiastes 10:14 A fool also multiplies words. No man knows what is to be; Who can tell him what will be after him? (NKJV)
4. ONLY GOD CAN SATISFY Ecclesiastes 6:7-8 All the labor of man [is] for his mouth, And yet the soul is not satisfied. 8 For what more has the wise [man] than the fool? What does the poor man have, Who knows [how] to walk before the living? (NKJV)
5. ONLY GOD GRANTS ETERNAL LIFE Ecclesiastes 6:6 even if he lives a thousand years twice -- but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place? (NKJV) Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do [it] with your might; for [there is] no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going. (NKJV)

The Doctrine of: Reality of death and brevity of life

1. EARTHLY LIFE IS SHORT Ecclesiastes 12:7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. (KJV) Genesis 3:19 In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou [art], and unto dust shalt thou return. (KJV)
2. EARTHLY LIFE IS TERMINAL Ecclesiastes 5:15 As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, To go as he came; And he shall take nothing from his labor Which he may carry away in his hand. (NKJV)
3. EARTHLY LIFE IS UNPREDICTABLE Ecclesiastes 9:12 For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, Like birds caught in a snare, So the sons of men [are] snared in an evil time, When it falls suddenly upon them. (NKJV)
4. EARTHLY LIFE SEEMS TO END LIKE THE ANIMALS Ecclesiastes 3:19 For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all [is] vanity. (NKJV)

5. EARTHLY LIFE ENDS IN DUST Ecclesiastes 12:7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it. (NKJV) BUT DEATH DOESN'T END IT ALL!

The Doctrine of: Pleasure and Living Life

- A. PLEASURE IS GOOD
- B. PLEASURE IS A GIFT FROM GOD
- C. PLEASURE IS OKAY! Pleasure does not dispel the vanity of life. It is not the answer to life. But pleasures lived to the glory of God are worthwhile. It is okay to do things in life just because we enjoy them.

The Doctrine of: Mankind and our Creator

- 1. GOD IS THE LIFE GIVER Ecclesiastes 7:29 Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, But they have sought out many schemes." (NKJV)
- 2. GOD HOLDS OUR DESTINY Ecclesiastes 9:1-2 For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works [are] in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred [by] anything [they see] before them. 2 All things [come] alike to all: One event [happens] to the righteous and the wicked; To the good, the clean, and the unclean; To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so [is] the sinner; He who takes an oath as [he] who fears an oath. (NKJV)
- 3. GOD IS SUPREME Ecclesiastes 7:13 Consider the work of God; For who can make straight what He has made crooked? (NKJV)
- 4. GOD IS TO BE FEARED Ecclesiastes 5:1-3 Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. 2 Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God [is] in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few. (NKJV)
- 5. GOD IS JUDGE. HIS JUDGMENT IS:
 - EFFECTIVE Ecclesiastes 2:26 For [God] gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who [is] good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to [him who is] good before God. This also [is] vanity and grasping for the wind. (NKJV) Ecclesiastes 5:6 Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger [of God] that it [was] an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? (NKJV)

- COMPREHENSIVE Ecclesiastes 12:14 For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil. (NKJV)
 - FINAL Ecclesiastes 3:14 I know that whatever God does, It shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, And nothing taken from it. God does [it,] that men should fear before Him. (NKJV)
6. MANKIND IS ETERNALLY ORIENTED PLACED BY GOD IN OUR HEARTS
Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. (NKJV)
 7. MANKIND ARE EITHER GOD FEARERS OR NON-FEARERS Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. 14 For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil. (NKJV)
 8. NO ONE IS RIGHTEOUS ON EARTH Ecclesiastes 7:20 For [there is] not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. (KJV) 1 Kings 8:46 When they sin against You (for [there is] no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy, far or near; (NKJV)
 9. GOD DESIRES RIGHTEOUSNESS OVER RELIGIOUS SACRIFICES Ecclesiastes 5:1 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. (KJV) 1 Samuel 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD [as great] delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey [is] better than sacrifice, [and] to hearken than the fat of rams. (KJV)

2 goals tonight:

I. Challenge you to get to know this vital book of wisdom.

- A. Ecclesiastes = theology (knowledge from God) of life
- B. Job = theology of suffering
- C. Psalms = theology of worshipping
- D. Proverbs = theology of living
- E. Song of Solomon = theology of loving
- F. 12 chapters/222 verses/5584 Hebrew words
- G. Why? Because it is so full of truth.

II. Let me just list some of the themes of 52 paragraphs.

- A. (1:1) Title
- B. (1:2-11) The failure of secularism
- C. (1:12-18) The failure of wisdom
- D. (2:1-11) The failure of pleasure-seeking
- E. (2:12-23) Life's ultimate certainty
- F. (2:24-26) The life of faith
- G. (3:1-15) The providence of God. (v. 13) pleasure is gift of God -- enjoy.
- H. (3:16-22) The judgment of God
- I. (4:1-3) Oppression without comfort.
- J. (4:4-6) Lonesome rivalry and its alternatives
- K. (4:7-8) A man without a family
- L. (4:9-12) The blessings of companionship
- M. (4:13-16) Isolation breeding folly
- N. (5:1-7) The approach to God
- O. (5:8-9) The poor under oppressive bureaucracy
- P. (5:10-12) Money and its drawbacks
- Q. (5:13-17) Wealth -- loved and lost. All left behind (v. 15)
- R. (5:18-20) Remedy recalled.
- S. (6:1-6) Wealth and its insecurity
- T. (6:7-9) Insatiable longing
- U. (6:10-12) An impasse
- V. (7:1-6) Instruction from suffering
- W. (7:7-10) Four dangers
- X. (7:11-12) The need of wisdom
- Y. (7:13-14) Life under the hand of God
- Z. (7:15-18) Dangers along the way
- AA. (7:19-22) The need of wisdom

BB.	(7:23-24)	The inaccessibility of wisdom
CC.	(7:25-29)	The sinfulness of man
DD.	(8:1)	Who is really wise?
EE.	(8:2-8)	Royal authority
FF.	(8:9-11)	Life's injustices
GG.	(8:12-13)	The life of faith
HH.	(8:14)	Again: life's injustices
II.	(8:15)	Again: the life of faith
JJ.	(8:16-9:1)	The enigma of life
KK.	(9:2-3)	The sting of death
LL.	(9:4-6)	Where there's life, there's hope
MM.	(9:7-10)	The remedy of faith
NN.	(9:11-12)	Time and chance. Death -- unpredictable (v. 12)
OO.	(9:13-16)	Wisdom unrecognized
PP.	(9:17-10:1)	Wisdom thwarted
QQ.	(10:2-3)	Folly
RR.	(10:4-7)	Folly in high places
SS.	(10:8-11)	Folly in action
TT.	(10:12-14)	The fool's talk
UU.	(10:15)	The fool's incompetence
VV.	(10:16-20)	Folly in its national implications
WW.	(11:1-6)	The venture of faith
XX.	(11:7-10)	The life of joy
YY.	(12:1-8)	The urgency of faith
ZZ.	(12:9-14)	Epilogue

AAA. Whew -- are you interested? Do you agree, this is a vital book?

III. Now, the second purpose. To infect you with the absolute practical value of this book in your life tonight! Have a Blast While You Last! *Ecclesiastes 9:1-10*²

A. Solomon "pulls out all the stops" in this section of his journal. With bold strokes of his pen, he comes right out and states some of the inevitable, inescapable realities in life. Following such brash assertions, he turns to the reader and offers counsel on how to conduct his or her life. We may resist the writer's conclusions and we may resent the go-for-broke attitude he sustains toward life, but we are hard pressed to offer a better plan, especially in light of the certainty of death and the evil-insane syndrome in which we are often caught. See if you don't agree that this section, though direct and bold, is very much in tune with life today.

B. Familiar Philosophies of Life. Every day we can see various philosophies of life exercised in the lives of those with whom we live, work, and do business. Let's look at four of the prevalent philosophies which surround us today.

² Swindoll sermon.

1. Materialism: Possessions satisfy! Provide yourself. Those who adhere to this philosophy seek to satisfy themselves through their possessions. Our society often equates personal success and worth with the quantity and quality of a person's possessions.
 2. Epicureanism: Life is a ball! Enjoy yourself. Many know this as hedonism, or a "playboy" lifestyle. All the puritanical restrictions of yesteryear are completely tossed aside as these people seek to satisfy every lustful urge and desire their bodies and minds can devise. It is a life of eating, drinking, and being merry completely apart from God.
 3. Humanism: Humanity is glorious! Exalt yourself. Humanism highlights the dignity, worth, and value of the human heart completely apart from God. It teaches that man is in complete control of his life and that through work and education he becomes better and more fulfilled.
 4. Fatalism: The game is fixed! Resign yourself. This is the most passive of the four philosophies. It believes that life's events are fixed and that we simply need to lie back and accept whatever comes our way. It frequently creates a doctrine of despair and a life of resignation and cynicism.
- C. Biblical Philosophy on Living (Eccl. 9:1-6). Not wanting man to become involved in these or any other manmade philosophy, Solomon brings us back to the realities of life. In order to build wisdom in our minds, the writer first blasts these philosophies, then guides us through reality with his wise counsel.
1. Inescapable and Inevitable Realities (vv. 1-6) Solomon begins to piece together a biblical philosophy by first examining four realities which are inescapable.
 - a) First, there is *the sovereign hand of God* (v. 1). All of man's "deeds are in the hand of God." We are not victims of chance, blindly groping our way through life. Nothing touches our lives that is not permitted by God. This assures us that life is not out of control.
 - b) Second, we all face *the absolute certainty of death* (v. 2). All men have the same fate before them. This thought is reinforced throughout Scripture (cf., Genesis 3, Psalm 89, Ezekiel 18, Romans 5, James 4, Revelation 20). No matter what we do to ignore it, death still remains a certain fact ahead in each of our lives.
 - c) Third, *within the human heart lurks evil and insanity* (v. 3). This is in complete opposition to the humanistic philosophy. This emphasizes the depravity of man which so many today resist, despite its prevalence all around us. Fourth, *there is hope for the living* (vv. 4-6). Here the writer turns wonderfully optimistic. He brings light into the darkness with this insight. Wherever there is

life, there is hope. With life come dreams, plans, purpose, love, and the possibility of change.

2. Counsel on How to Respond to Such Realities (vv. 7-10). With a solid foundation laid for this biblical philosophy, this wiseman continues with counsel to enjoy life as fully as possible. His four observations are introduced by the words, “Go then,” implying that there is action involved. Solomon sees life as something to participate in and not merely observe.
 - a) First, *live happily wherever you are* (v. 7). Solomon notes everyday events which are done in a spirit of happiness. If we’re in the family of God, we need not live with guilt; we can live happily knowing that we’re approved by God.
 - b) Second, *walk in purity and the power of the Spirit* (v. 8). Without this limitation, it would appear that the Preacher endorses a hedonic lifestyle. True, we are free from the guilt and penalty of sin, but we are also called to a life of righteousness and purity.
 - c) Third, *give yourself completely to a happy married life* (v. 9). The Hebrew text reads literally, “see life with the wife you love”; enjoy the full range of all human emotion and passion with the person to whom you are married.
 - d) Fourth, *throw yourself fully into all of life* (v. 10). There is much in life to be experienced and enjoyed, and here our counselor advises, enjoy life completely. Be totally involved. Notice also that Solomon gives this advice from a more God-centered perspective and not from the pessimistic point of view which we have seen.
- D. So? How shall we then live? That’s a question we ask ourselves over and over. When we expose many of the philosophies that we’ve adhered to all our lives, what’s left? How are we supposed to live? It really isn’t as complicated as it sounds. In this text Solomon gives us a sound biblical philosophy which is built around four points. Simply put...
 1. Be free of guilt. As God’s children, we are forgiven and He has already approved our works.
 2. Be contagiously happy. Happiness is a state of mind and a conscious decision we must all make. It does not come from anything outside ourselves.
 3. Be committed to God. This includes commitment to marriage as well.
 4. Be thoroughly involved. In the power of the Spirit, live life to its fullest with everything you’ve got!

Be Honest to God (Ecc. 5:1–7)

Be Honest to Others (Ecc. 5:8–9)

Be Honest to Yourself (Ecc. 5:10–20)

In this chapter, Solomon issues three warnings that relate to the values of life.

1. Don't rob the Lord (Ecc. 5:1-7)

Solomon had visited the courtroom, the marketplace, the highway, and the palace. Now he paid a visit to the temple, that magnificent building whose construction he had supervised. He watched the worshipers come and go, praising God, praying, sacrificing, and making vows. He noted that many of them were not at all sincere in their worship, and they left the sacred precincts in worse spiritual condition than when they had entered. What was their sin? They were robbing God of the reverence and honor that He deserved. Their acts of worship were perfunctory, insincere, and hypocritical.

In today's language, "Keep thy foot!" means "Watch your step!" Even though God's glorious presence doesn't dwell in our church buildings as it did in the temple, believers today still need to heed this warning. *The worship of God is the highest ministry of the church and must come from devoted hearts and yielded wills.* For God's people to participate in public worship while harboring unconfessed sin is to ask for God's rebuke and judgment (Isa. 1:10-20; Amos 5; Ps. 50).

Solomon touched on several aspects of worship, the first of which was *the offering of sacrifices* (v. 1). God's people today don't offer animals to the Lord as in Old Testament times, because Jesus Christ has fulfilled all the sacrifices in His death on the cross (Heb. 10:1-14). But as the priests of God, believers today offer up spiritual sacrifices through Him: our bodies (Rom. 12:1-2); people won to the Saviour (Rom. 15:16); money (Phil. 4:18); praise and good works (Heb. 13:15-16); a broken heart (Ps. 51:17); and our prayers of faith (Ps. 141:1-2).

The important thing is that the worshiper "be more ready to hear," that is, to obey the Word of God. Sacrifices are not substitutes for obedience, as King Saul found out when he tried to cover up his disobedience with pious promises (1 Sam. 15:12-23). Offerings in the hands without obedient faith in the heart become "the sacrifice of fools," because *only a fool thinks he can deceive God*. The fool thinks he is doing good, but he or she is only doing evil. And God knows it.

Then Solomon issued a warning about *careless praying* (vv. 2-3). Prayer is serious business. Like marriage, "it must not be entered into lightly or carelessly, but soberly and in the fear of God." If you and I were privileged to bring our needs and requests to the White House or to Buckingham Palace, we would prepare our words carefully and exhibit proper behavior. How much more important it is when we come to the throne of Almighty God. Yet, there is so much flippant praying done by people who seem to know nothing about the fear of the Lord.

When you pray, watch out for both *hasty words* and *too many words* (Matt. 6:7). The secret of acceptable praying is a prepared heart (Ps. 141:1-2), because the mouth speaks what the heart contains (Matt. 12:34-37). If we pray only to impress people, we will not get through to God. The author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan, wrote: "In prayer, it is better to have a heart without words, than words without a heart."

Verse 3 presents an analogy: Just as many dreams show that the person sleeping is a hard worker, so many words show that the person praying is a fool (Prov. 29:20). I recall a

church prayer meeting during which a young man prayed eloquently and at great length, but nobody sensed the power of God at work. When an uneducated immigrant stood up and stammered out her brief prayer in broken English, we all said a fervent “Amen!” We sensed that God had heard her requests. Spurgeon said, “It is not the length of our prayers, but the strength of our prayers, that makes the difference.”

Solomon’s third admonition had to do with *making vows to the Lord* (vv. 4–7). God did not require His people to make vows in order to be accepted by Him, but the opportunity was there for them to express their devotion if they felt led to do so (see Num. 30; Deut. 23:21–23; Acts 18:18).

The Preacher warned about two sins. The first was that of making the vow with no intention of keeping it, in other words, lying to God. The second sin was making the vow but delaying to keep it, hoping you could get out of it. When the priest [“angel” = messenger] came to collect the promised sacrifice or gift, the person would say, “Please forget about my vow! It was a mistake!”

God hears what we say and holds us to our promises, unless they were so foolish that He could only dismiss them. If providence prevents us from fulfilling what we promised, God understands and will release us. If we made our vows only to impress others, or perhaps to “bribe” the Lord (“If God answers my prayer, I will give \$500 to missions!”), then we will pay for our careless words. Many times in my pastoral ministry I have heard sick people make promises to God as they asked for healing, only to see those promises forgotten when they recovered.

People make empty vows because they live in a religious “dream world”; they think that *words* are the same as *deeds* (v. 7). Their worship is not serious, so their words are not dependable. They enjoy the “good feelings” that come when they make their promises to God, but they do themselves more harm than good. They like to “dream” about fulfilling their vows, but they never get around to doing it. They practice a make-believe religion that neither glorifies God nor builds Christian character.

“I will go into thy house with burnt offerings; I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble” (Ps. 66:13–14). When we rob the Lord of the worship and honor due to Him, we are also robbing ourselves of the spiritual blessings He bestows on those who “worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

2. Don’t rob others (Ecc. 5:8–9)

Solomon left the temple and went to the city hall where he again witnessed corrupt politicians oppressing the poor (3:16–17; 4:1–3). The government officials violated the law by using their authority to help themselves and not to serve others, a practice condemned by Moses (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 24:17).

The remarkable thing is that Solomon wrote, “Don’t be surprised at this!” He certainly did not approve of their unlawful practices, but he knew too much about the human heart to expect anything different from the complicated bureaucracy in Israel.

The NIV translation of verse 8 gives a vivid description of the situation: “One official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still.” Instead of the poor man

getting a fair hearing, “the matter is lost in red tape and bureaucracy” (v. 8, TLB), and the various officials pocket the money that should have gone to the innocent poor man.

Verse 9 is difficult and major translations do not agree. The general idea seems to be that in spite of corruption in the bureaucracy, it is better to have organized government, and a king over the land, than to have anarchy. A few dishonest people may profit from corrupt practices, but *everybody* benefits from organized authority. Of course, the ideal is to have a government that is both honest and efficient, but man’s heart being what it is, the temptation to dishonest gain is always there. Lord Acton wrote to Bishop Mandell Creighton in 1887, “Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Solomon’s investigation bears this out.

3. Don’t rob yourself (Ecc. 5:10–20)

Solomon had already discussed “the futility of wealth” in 2:1–11, and some of those ideas are repeated here. 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.

Wealth brings satisfaction (v. 10). Some people treat money as though it were a god. They love it, make sacrifices for it, and think that it can do anything. Their minds are filled with thoughts about it; their lives are controlled by getting it and guarding it; and when they have it, they experience a great sense of security. What faith in the Lord does for the Christian, money does for many unbelievers. How often we hear people say, “Well, money may not be the number one thing in life, but it’s way ahead of whatever is number two!”

The person who loves money cannot be satisfied no matter how much is in the bank account—because the human heart was made to be satisfied only by God (3:11). “Take heed and beware of covetousness,” warned Jesus, “for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses” (Luke 12:15, NKJV). First the person loves money, and then he loves *more* money, and the disappointing pursuit has begun that can lead to all sorts of problems. “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10, NKJV).

Money solves every problem (v. 11). There is no escaping the fact that we need a certain amount of money in order to live in this world, but money *of itself* is not the magic “cure-all” for every problem. In fact, an increase in wealth usually creates new problems that we never even knew existed before. Solomon mentioned one: relatives and friends start showing up and enjoying our hospitality. All we can do is watch them eat up our wealth. Or perhaps it is the tax agent who visits us and decides that we owe the government more money.

John Wesley, cofounder of the Methodist Church, told his people, “Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can.” Wesley himself could have been a very wealthy man, but he chose to live simply and give generously.

Wealth brings peace of mind (v. 12). The late Joe Louis, world heavyweight boxing

champion, used to say, “I don’t like money actually, but it quiets my nerves.” But Solomon said that possessing wealth is no guarantee that your nerves will be calm and your sleep sound. According to him, the common laborer sleeps better than the rich man. The suggestion seems to be that the rich man ate too much and was kept awake all night by an upset stomach. But surely Solomon had something greater in mind than that. *The Living Bible* expresses verse 12 perfectly: “The man who works hard sleeps well whether he eats little or much, but the rich must worry and suffer insomnia.”

More than one preacher has mentioned John D. Rockefeller in his sermons as an example of a man whose life was almost ruined by wealth. At the age of fifty-three, Rockefeller was the world’s only billionaire, earning about a million dollars a week. But he was a sick man who lived on crackers and milk and could not sleep because of worry. When he started giving his money away, his health changed radically and he lived to celebrate his ninety-eighth birthday!

Yes, it’s good to have the things that money can buy, provided you don’t lose the things that money can’t buy.

Wealth provides security (vv. 13–17). The picture here is of two rich men. One hoarded all his wealth and ruined himself by becoming a miser. The other man made some unsound investments and lost his wealth. He was right back where he started from and had no estate to leave to his son. He spent the rest of his days in the darkness of discouragement and defeat, and he did not enjoy life. Like all of us, he brought nothing into the world at birth, and he took nothing out of the world at death (see Job 1:21; Ps. 49:17; 1 Tim. 6:7).

This account makes us think of our Lord’s parable about the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13–21). The man thought all his problems were solved when he became rich, but immediately he was faced with providing bigger barns for his wealth. He thought he was safe and secure for years to come, but that night he died! His money provided no security whatsoever.

Keep in mind that Solomon was advocating neither poverty nor riches, because both have their problems (Prov. 30:7–9). The Preacher was warning his listeners against the love of money and the delusions that wealth can bring. In the closing verses of the chapter (vv. 18–20), he affirmed once again the importance of accepting our station in life and enjoying the blessings that God gives to us.

The thing that is “good and fitting” (v. 18, NKJV) is to labor faithfully, enjoy the good things of life, and accept it all as the gracious gift of God. Solomon gave us this wise counsel before in 2:24, 3:12–13, and 3:22, and he will repeat it at least three more times before he ends his “sermon.”

There are three ways to get wealth: we can work for it, we can steal it, or we can receive it as a gift (see Eph. 4:28). Solomon saw the blessings of life as God’s gift to those who work and who accept that work as the favor of God. “To enjoy your work and to accept your lot in life—that is indeed a gift from God” (v. 19, TLB).

Solomon added another important thought: the ability to *enjoy* life’s blessings is also a gift from God. Solomon will expand on this thought in the next chapter and point out the unhappiness of people who possess wealth but are not able to enjoy it. We thank God for

food, but we should also thank Him for healthy taste buds and a digestive system that functions correctly. A wealthy friend, now in heaven, often took me and my wife to expensive restaurants, but he was unable to enjoy the food because he couldn't taste it. All of his wealth could not purchase healing for his taste buds.

Verse 20 may mean that the person who rejoices in God's daily blessings will never have regrets. "The person who does that will not need to look back with sorrow on his past, for God gives him joy" (TLB). The time to start storing up happy memories is *now*. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:12).

It may also mean that the believer who gratefully accepts God's gifts today will not fret and worry about how long he or she will live. It is an established fact that the people who have the most birthdays live the longest, but if they keep complaining about "getting old" they will have very little to enjoy. People who are thankful to God "will not dwell overmuch upon the passing years," as the *New English Bible* translates verse 20. They will take each day as it comes and use it to serve the Lord.

In chapter 6, Solomon will conclude his discussion of "the futility of wealth." He might well have chosen Matthew 6:33 as the text for his message, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (NKJV). The important thing is that we love the Lord, accept the lot He assigns us, and enjoy the blessings He graciously bestows.

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.³

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Satisfied*. "Be" Commentary Series (p. 19). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.