

Biblical Soul Care
Lesson 8: Not everyone enjoys life
Ecclesiastes chapter 6

Introduction: Solomon has put an emphasis on money and work. Work is a major part of life. Earning money through toil/labor is one of the primary reasons we work. God provides the gifts of work, money and the grace to enjoy them. Qoheleth has made this point over and over. Perhaps because he knows that the truths that impact and shape our life need to be repeated. Biblical worldviews are formed through repetition and must be instilled and embedded into our hearts and minds. He knows not everyone enjoys this life under the sun so in chapter 6 he appeals once more to the assembly to not spoil the gifts of labor and money and waste our breath but rather to enjoy the gifts and the Giver during the few days of this fleeting life. Solomon observes 3 case histories in verses 1-9 and ends that section with the familiar phrase 'This too is futility (*hebel*) and a striving after wind' (verse 9b). He does not employ this phrase the rest of the book. Verse 10 is the middle of the Hebrew text of Ecclesiastes. Verses 10-12 serve as a hinge, set up the remainder of the book, and introduce the theme for the second half. But first we have a few more dark observations by Solomon. Soon, he will bring us out of the dimly lit forest which was full of reflections, arguments, questions, deductions, and conclusions and into proverbs and instructions of the better life in God under the sun.

No satisfaction or enjoyment in the gifts of God and the outwardly blessed life: 6:1-6

6 Here is another misfortune that I have seen on earth, and it weighs heavily on people: ²God gives a man riches, property, and wealth so that he lacks nothing that his heart desires, yet God does not enable him to enjoy the fruit of his labor—instead, someone else enjoys it! This is fruitless and a grave misfortune. ³Even if a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, even if he lives a long, long time, but cannot enjoy his prosperity—even if he were to live forever—I would say, “A stillborn child is better off than he is.” ⁴Though the stillborn child came into the world for no reason and departed into darkness, though its name is shrouded in darkness, ⁵though it never saw the light of day nor knew anything, yet it has more rest than that man—⁶if he should live a thousand years twice, yet does not enjoy his prosperity. For both of them die! **NET**

6 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: ²a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil. ³If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life's good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. ⁴For it

comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered.⁵ Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he.⁶ Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place? **ESV**

Question: What is this (hypothetical or actual) man, who is wealthy, prosperous, lives a long time and has many children, unable to do?

Observations and Truths from verses 1-6:

Summary: We encounter one of Solomon's hypothetical yet all too common characters. This person has everything: wealth, possessions, and children. Then he dies. What is missing in his outwardly blessed life is the ability to enjoy the blessings. Borgman

It is no easy task to walk this earth and find peace. Inside of us, it would seem, something is at odds with the very rhythm of things and we are forever restless, dissatisfied, frustrated and aching. We are so overcharged with desire that it is hard to come to simple rest. Desire is always stronger than satisfaction. As we walk this restless earth, full of desire, we are never fully satisfied. Ryken

1 Timothy 6:6–8

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

Full, but not satisfied: 6:7-9

⁷ All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. ⁸ For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living? ⁹ Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind. **ESV**

⁷ All man's labor is for nothing more than to fill his stomach—yet his appetite is never satisfied! ⁸ So what advantage does a wise man have over a fool? And what advantage does a pauper gain by knowing how to survive? ⁹ It is better to be content with what the eyes can see than for one's heart always to crave more. This continual longing is futile—like chasing the wind. **NET**

⁷ All people spend their lives scratching for food, but they never seem to have enough. ⁸ So are wise people really better off than fools? Do poor people gain anything by being wise and knowing how to act in front of others? ⁹ Enjoy what you have rather than desiring what you don't have. Just dreaming about nice things is meaningless—like chasing the wind. **NLT**

Observations and truths from verses 7-9

The truth is that only God can truly satisfy---through His Word, through His worship, and through the help that comes from the Holy Spirit when we turn to Him in prayer. This is important to remember whenever we feel unhappy about anything in life. We need to ask ourselves what we truly need and remind ourselves what God wants to give us. Before we buy something, or eat something or turn something on, it is better to talk things over with our Father in Heaven, saying something like, "Lord, you know how empty I feel right now. Help me not to run away from my problems but to turn them

over to you. Teach me that you are enough for me. And by your grace, give me the peace and the joy that you have for me in Jesus.” Ryken

The way life works: Verses 10-12

¹⁰ Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he. ¹¹ The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man? ¹² For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun? **ESV**

¹⁰ Whatever has happened was foreordained, and what happens to a person was also foreknown. It is useless for him to argue with God about his fate because God is more powerful than he is. ¹¹ The more one argues with words, the less he accomplishes. How does that benefit him? ¹² For no one knows what is best for a person during his life—during the few days of his fleeting life—for they pass away like a shadow. Nor can anyone tell him what the future will hold for him on earth. **NET**

Question: Do you notice any attributes or perfections of God in these 3 verses?

Observations and Truths from verses 10-12

If we are unhappy with the way things are, there is no sense arguing with God about it. This seems to be what the Preacher means when he talks about disputing with someone stronger than we are. The “one stronger” is Almighty God. Sometimes people do try to argue with God---like Job for example---but usually they come to regret it. After God answered him out of the whirlwind, Job had to confess, “I have uttered what I did not understand...therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:3,6).

We need to know our limits, and one of our limits is that we do not have the wisdom to out-talk God. No matter what we say, telling God that He ought to do this or shouldn’t do that, our words will never change His wise plan for ruling the universe. To help keep us in our place the Apostle Paul asked, “Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?” (Romans 9:20). Ryken

Romans 11:33-36

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how unfathomable his ways!

³⁴ ***For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?***

³⁵ ***Or who has first given to God
that God needs to repay him?***

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever!
Amen.

The Preacher still does not have all the answers, which is why some people find this chapter very pessimistic. In knowing how to respond to this perspective, it will help us to remember where we are in Ecclesiastes, and where we are in the Bible as a whole. The Preacher begins this chapter by talking about the evil that he has seen “under the sun.” Although he has mentioned God from time to time, he has mainly been looking at life from a human perspective, which is true as far as it goes. We do suffer a good deal of disappointment in life. We also have questions that have never been answered to our satisfaction. But understand the Preacher’s purpose: by talking openly about our disappointment with life, he is trying to awaken our longing for God. Some of our questions will get answered by the end of his book. Others will be left unanswered for the time being, but they do get answered in the gospel! Ryken

Question: How has the study of Ecclesiastes impacted you so far? Has it changed your worldview of life under the sun?

Question: How have you come to know God in a deeper, more intimate way?

Question: In what ways does God reveal His Sovereignty in a person's life?

Question: What has Solomon exhorted us to enjoy on numerous occasions?

Question: How has Ecclesiastes impacted your view of and worship of God?

