

Solomon: The Principle of Success that Matters

Ecclesiastes 1, 2 and 12, 1 Kings 11,

Good morning men! Let's go ahead and begin today by reminding ourselves we're in this series *How God Makes Men*, and really what the promise of this is, is that it's a way for us to learn how God wants to help us exchange that shallow, cultural Christianity that wants to gut our manhood, and exchange that for more of a Biblical Christianity.

Let's go ahead and do a shout out. We have a new group today, just two guys so far in this group. Mike Baker's the leader. They're meeting on a weekly basis at United and Love Worship Center in Walhalla, SC, and they want to grow and recruit more members to be part of their group. They're joining us, and I wonder if you would join me in welcoming them to the Man in the Mirror Men's Bible Study. One, two, three, hoorah! Good to have you guys with us!

So again the series is *How God Makes Men*. This morning I want to talk to you about the principle of success that matters. We're going to look at the life of Solomon. As someone who works with men as a vocation, I am pretty astonished at how few men are genuinely and truly content with who they are and what they do, and that's whether they're Christians or not Christians. So what I want us to do today is to look into a story that will give us a principle that really has the power to help change our lives in two ways. Number one, our own sense of contentment and happiness, but also two, there are men pulling up next to you at all the stop lights that seem like their senses have been numbed. They have been seeking a success that they thought would satisfy them, and it hasn't. They're confused, they're exhausted with the "me now" fast pace of this life that we live. So there's also an opportunity not only for you but also an opportunity for other men going through this kind of a situation.

Solomon's Story

The first thing I would like us to talk about is Solomon's story. Solomon had this dream, and you can look it up later in 1 Kings 3, we've talked about it before. He had this dream, and God appeared to him and basically said ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you. Solomon as a young man prayed that God would give him wisdom to govern his people. God said because you did not ask for riches, for power, for long life, I'm going to give you what you've asked for. I'm going to give you wisdom like no human being has ever had before! But, not only that, because you didn't ask for fame and power, I'm going to give you unparalleled wealth, such that there will be no king who's ever lived before who will be an equal to you. Not now or in the future. And so he had this incredible start, he had this unlimited potential. And Solomon leveraged what God had given him, this money, intelligence, wisdom, power, and position, he leveraged that and he became the most astonishing figure! He became incredibly wealthy, he became the greatest patron of the arts, he became the poet warrior of his country, he became the first Pulitzer Prize winner, he wrote Song of Solomon, he wrote many of the Proverbs, he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, he became a great merchant, he became this incredible real estate developer, his projects are still unrivaled in terms of his architectural designs and real estate projects. He had vineyards, he had livestock, and in fact people came from around the world just to listen to

Solomon. The Queen of Sheba came to see Solomon, and when she saw his splendor she said they didn't tell me the half of it, so great is your wealth and your wisdom!

So he had this incredible gift from God, and he had this great start from God, but then something happened. It's something that happened to me, and it's something that has probably happened to you. In fact I'm almost certain that it's happened to you. I'm almost certain that it's happening to most of the men you'll come in contact with today, and that is that he decided that God wasn't enough. That God alone wasn't enough to make him happy, he also needed something else. He decided that God alone was not enough to make him happy, he needed something else. So he began to try to have the best of both worlds. He began to seek the best of what God had to offer, Solomon was definitely a Christian, he will definitely be in heaven, you will definitely meet Solomon someday. Solomon definitely believed in the Messiah. We believe in the Christ of history, but he believed in the Christ of prophecy. He definitely believed! You will meet him someday. He definitely was trying to have the best that God had to offer, but then he decided that that wasn't enough to make him happy, and he also decided to try and have the best of what the world has to offer. He became a divided man, a double minded man. He was trying to have the best of both worlds, he was trying to have his cake and eat it to. As I said, that's certainly what I went through.

From the moment I became a Christian, I loved God. I mean I really loved God, and I can never remember a moment when I haven't really and truly deeply loved God. Now I know that the only reason I love him is because he first loved me, and you know that too. But even though I loved God so much, I still wanted the spoils. I wanted the plunder that I could get by taking my own strength, my own wisdom, my own power, my own abilities, and my own competence. I wanted to see how far I could push and how much I could get, because I made a decision at some point that God alone was not enough to make me happy, that I really needed to be a success in the world to be truly happy. I needed to have the adulation of people who would look and say wow he's successful! I admire him! And you know what I'm talking about, we've all done it, you can't help it. It just seems to be something that, whether it's nature or nurture I don't know, but we live in a culture, an environment, that is so top heavy after worshipping beauty, brains, bucks, and brawn. If you got one of those four things, or more than one, you're kind of in, and if you don't, you're out. So there's this pressure to be accepted by the world. There is this pressure to try to have our cake and eat it, too.

You've heard me tell the story about the congressman that was once asked about his attitude toward whiskey. He said, well if you mean that demon drink that poisons the mind, pollutes the body, and desecrates family life, then I'm against it. But, if you mean the elixir of Christmas cheer, or that shield against the cold winter chill, or that taxable potion that puts needed funds into the public coffers to comfort little crippled children, then I'm for it. That is my position and I will not compromise. Trying to have your cake and eat it too, you know what I'm talking about. God has preserved the story of Solomon for us because Solomon did this exact same thing. God has preserved this story for us to completely demolish the credibility of the argument that somehow you will find happiness apart from him. It's just not going to happen. Let's take a look at his story, and I want to start with his sorrows. If you would look at Ecclesiastes 1:2, it's later on in Solomon's life. 1 Kings 11 says that:

As Solomon grew older, his wives turned his heart after other gods and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of his father David had been.

And in Ecclesiastes 1:2 he says this:

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

And over in chapter 2 verse 17 he says:

I hated my life.

How is this possible? How is it possible that a man could get everything he wants in life, and still not be happy? But that is exactly what’s happened to Solomon. And because of the sheer volume of his wealth, his wisdom, his position, his accomplishments and his accumulations, God has preserved this story so that you and I might be spared if we would leverage the wisdom that he has put in the book. That we would leverage the wisdom so that we would not have to go the way of Solomon.

So filled with sorrows, what was his mistake? Well in the simplest form, when his heart was turned after other gods, he had intermarried with the culture. How many of us intermarry with the culture? We adopt some custom, adopt some value system that we think is really going to make us happy and be important. We intermarry with the culture like that, and our hearts turn after other gods. And then what happened to Solomon happens to us, for bad company corrupts good character. So instead of getting them to go to his temple, he went to theirs. And isn’t that it in a nutshell? So we’re out in the culture, we’re trying to make a difference, and if we are not vigilant there is a good case in the Bible that there’s just as much a chance the world will corrupt you as you will corrupt the world. You do have to be vigilant, he was not. Solomon’s mistake was that he decided to pursue his meaning apart from God, and apart from God, life has no meaning. God has so ordered his world that you simply cannot find purpose and meaning apart from him. So he had this belief system that was perfectly designed to produce a meaningful life. Why? Simply this, try and have the best of both worlds. So you have to make a decision. Am I going to try to have the best of both worlds?

Now, there is absolutely nothing wrong with success. The Bible talks a lot about success; there is no wisdom, no insight, and no plan that can succeed against the Lord. The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory or success rests with the Lord. So God is very interested in the whole idea of success, but he also says to men belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue. All a man’s ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord. Commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed. God very much wants us to be successful, but he wants us to be successful on his plan. I was talking about this with our staff a little earlier in the week. There is a tendency to make our plan and then our prayer is to ask God to make the plan we’ve already made successful, but the God way is to come to him. To pray and ask him to give us the plan, and then he will make that plan successful because it is his plan!

So the Big Idea for the day is this: **God makes men by making it impossible to find lasting happiness in any pursuit apart from him.**

His Project

Next, let’s talk about Solomon’s project. So if you would look at Ecclesiastes 2:3. Solomon has done us a great service here, and this is his project, the last sentence in verse 3. He says:

I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

And what was his strategy? Drop back to chapter 1 verse 12. He said:

So I devoted myself to study and explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven.

So this book Ecclesiastes reads like a Ph. D. dissertation. You've got the problem, the research question, the findings, the conclusions, the recommendations, it's all in here and we're going to look at a little bit of it right now. Let's take a look at his strategy. Look at chapter 2 and begin at verse 4. Here's what he did. He's trying to find what is worthwhile for you to do during these few days of life that you have. He's exploring and studying everything done under heaven with his wisdom. Verse 4:

I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees. I made reservoirs. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves. I owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers and a harem as well – the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet...

Just pause there for a moment and think about all the possible ways that you or the men who are going to be around you all day long today are striving, trying to achieve. What? Why? Maybe they don't even know that! All of the different ways that men will attempt to find happiness and success today, every single one of them will fit into Solomon's list here. Things that he has already tried, and this is what he says in verse 11:

Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

Now what made it meaningless? What made it meaningless was that he was pursuing these things to find meaning apart from God! If he had brought all of these things under the umbrella of responding to what God had been leading him to do, he would have had a very different result. But he is trying to find out how he can find happiness, what's worthwhile for a man to do apart from God! What a great case study!

And so, the findings over in chapter 3 verse 11. He's found this, that:

God has made everything beautiful in its own way and its own time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

And then watch this! He says:

I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and to do good while they live. That every man may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in his toil – this is the gift of God. I know that everything that God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing can be taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.

So men, God does these things. He puts limits on how we can find our meaning, happiness, and success apart from him. He does that so that we will revere him. God will not force us to revere him, he's not

going to do that, it just isn't how he operates. God will not force us to revere him, but he will make it impossible for us to be happy until we do. And that's what Solomon has been experiencing here. God was not forcing him to revere him; he had this incredible relationship with God in the beginning! But God did not force Solomon to revere him. Once he stopped doing that, once he stopped worshipping God, once he started worshipping idols, once he started looking for his satisfaction, his happiness apart from God, then God made it impossible for him to be happy. And you must understand that this is not a curse. It certainly has its negative aspects, but it's a blessing! God does this as an act of grace, as an act of mercy, to rescue Solomon from utterly destroying himself and to rescue us as well. The reason he has to do this is because if you and I could find any shred of happiness, real lasting happiness, apart from God, that's what we'd do.

John Calvin says men are idol factories, we manufacture idols. If we could find any satisfaction apart from God, then we would. So that's why God intervenes and makes it impossible for us to find our happiness apart from him. It's a blessing! So I hope that you can see that basically, Solomon has pretty much demolished the possibility of credibly arguing that you could find any happiness apart from God. Yet, I'm pretty sure that half of us and most of all the others will today leave this room and go pursue an idol that you think is going to make you happy. Even though we hear this message today, half of us are going to leave here, we're going to walk away from it, and we're going to say that was for Bill, he really needed that message today. But, I can't be happy unless I become a vice president. I cannot be happy unless I can figure out how to trick this woman into marrying me. Or I can't be happy until I can figure out how to get rid of this woman! Or I can't be happy unless I can live in an X dollar house instead of a Y dollar house. There's no way I can be happy unless I can get this Master's degree. I will never be happy unless I can get my book published. Whatever it is! What God wants us all to understand is that even if those things happen, apart from him they will not make us happy. So what he does is he makes us by making it impossible for any of these pursuits apart from him to bring us a lasting happiness. We call that grace.

The Big Idea again: **God makes men by making it impossible to find lasting happiness in any pursuit apart from him.** Are you still hanging on to this? Really? Are you really still hanging on to this idea that somehow you, out of the wells of confidence, competence, abilities, schooling, and expertise that you have, are really going to find happiness on your own? Give it all to the Lord Jesus, give it all to God, and then invite him to do with your life whatever he pleases.

Your Story

Finally, let's just take a look at your story. At the very end of Ecclesiastes, it says in chapter 12:13:

Now all has been heard, and hear is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commands, for this is the whole duty of man.

So fear God or revere God. God won't force you to revere him, but he's going to make it impossible to be happy unless you do. So fear God and keep his commands. Be obedient. Jesus said if you love me you will what? John 14 says it three times, if you love me you will obey me, keep my commands. So obedience in reverence or in the fear of God. Solomon says do that, and you'll be okay. I was with somebody a few days ago who. I love this young person, but their life has been about having a good time. About a year ago this person had a terrible automobile accident on an interstate, the car rolled and some fairly serious injuries. Then, this person's grandfather died a few months ago, and within the last few weeks, this person has gotten a divorce. So three terribly difficult things that have happened

over the last twelve months. So I took a risk and mention to this person that suffering compels us to seek the God that success makes us think we don't need. There was instant recognition! This person got it! They had been pursuing a success that doesn't really matter. They had been pursuing happiness apart from God. This person knows Christ, but has been pursuing a good time, happiness apart from God. But God loves us so much that he will not let us destroy ourselves, and he will bring whatever suffering, whatever travails into our lives that we need in order to get our attention. Whether it's rolling in a car and having severe injuries, or having your grandfather die, or getting a divorce even. God doesn't author any of those things, but he did not disallow them either because he's trying to figure out how to make us into people who abandon the shallow, hollow, cultural Christianity that's gutting our manhood to replace it with a Biblical Christianity.

So there's that for you, but then there's also what's going on with the other people around you. Yesterday I had to get some tires, and tell you what getting tires on a sports car is really great! I noticed they were a lot "grippier" on the way to the Bible Study this morning, and my thrill is going around corners too fast, but anyway. Pretty boring life. But this is my Facebook post that I put up this morning. You can see them sitting next to you at any traffic light in America. The pace has numbed their senses, they don't get enough rest, and they're always on the fly. They rarely reflect, they do not often sense the presence of God. Ironically, they spent decades getting what they wanted only to find out that it doesn't make them happy. They have success but no peace, things but no pleasure, a great job but no gratitude for it, money but no vision to serve others, and relationships but no time to enjoy them. They are unbalanced, unstable, and high risk to themselves and their families. These are the men that Jesus had in mind when he said go and make disciples. So, when you come across a man like this, reach out. I did this yesterday and offered a man a copy of *Is Christianity for You?* It was the guy I bought the tires from. He thanked me profusely and said, you know this is timely. Recently I've been thinking about my own mortality and what comes after. I really need this. You just never know! God is right now preparing some of the men to whom you will speak to. They are aching to find the way, because they have been seeking happiness apart from God. They have not revered God. God has made it impossible for them to be happy, and they are aching for someone. Now they are wearing their game face the best that they can, so they're not just going to let you know that this is what's going on, but they are aching for someone to reach out to them. Will you do that? Why? Because of this: the Big Idea is that **God is making us, and making all men, by making it impossible to find any lasting happiness apart from him.** Get it? Let's go get it!

Closing Prayer

Our dearest Father, we thank you so much for the story of Solomon. What a blessing it is to see his life! And we pray God that no man in this room or that ever hears this message will be one of the men that would walk away and go and seek an idol anyway. Lord I just pray that for most of the men who are hearing this message that this is a reminder. But that's why we come Lord, we come to be reminded! So let it be an encouragement for those men who are on the right path to stay the course, and for those who might be flirting with maybe God really isn't enough to make me happy, Lord let it solidify in their minds the gospel of your grace. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen!