

Solomon's Twelve Secrets

Session 3: Solomon's Prescription For a Happy Life

Edited Transcript

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Good morning, men. Please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter three. As we get going this morning, our series is Solomon's 12 Secrets: Lessons on Life From Ecclesiastes, we're going to begin with a shout out, which goes to Men Becoming Men. What a great name. I've never seen anybody name their group that before, but it's pretty darn good. Craig Hodge in Jackson, Georgia is the leader. I looked you guys up on Google Maps. It looks like you're probably a little bit of a suburb of Atlanta to the south but an independent place. Looks like a lovely city. A group of men who just started meeting with us on Saturdays at 8:00 AM. Craig writes in, "This group's purpose," I just love this. I mean, nobody's ever come up with a better purpose statement than this, "This group's purpose is to connect men to the original intent." Whoa. "We as men need to know what we were created for." How about that? Would you join me in giving a very warm rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to Men Becoming Men? One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome, guys. Good to have you with us.

WE CAN ADD NOTHING TO WHAT GOD DOES, NOR CAN WE TAKE ANYTHING AWAY

Again, the series, Solomon's 12 Secrets today. Chapter three, Solomon's prescription for a happy life. First thing we're going to talk about is how we can add nothing to what God does nor take anything away from it. Just by a little bit of review, in this book in chapter one verse 13, Solomon said that he wanted to search out and explore everything that was done under the heaven. His conclusion was, after looking at everything, that he found it to be meaningless. Then, last time were together, the big idea, "Apart from God, life has no meaning". Then, last time we were together on this, he was asking the question, "So what is it that is worthwhile for a man to do during the few days of life that he has?" We looked at all the different ways that Solomon had pursued meaning, and he had found them to be so meaningless that he hated his life, and then he finally found something that was worthwhile. It is good when a man can eat, drink, and find satisfaction in his labor.

Then, he also went on in verse 26, "To the man who pleases God, he gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness." Now we come to this third chapter. The big idea from the last time we were together, even "If you get exactly what you want, you're still not going to be happy without God". We're to chapter three today. In this first section, we read about how there is a time for everything, a season for every activity under heaven, time to be born, die, plant, uproot. I'm looking at chapter three verses one and following, plant, uproot, kill, heal, tear down, build, weep, laugh, mourn, dance, scatter stones, gather them, embrace, refrain, search, give up, time to keep and throw away, tear down men, be silent, be loved, hate, war, and peace.

There are these seasons. There are rhythms to life. We all go through them. I'm going through a rhythm to life right now. Some of you know, nobody online would know this, but I mentioned to some of you

here as a sidebar how my wife had had back surgery now four weeks ago. She's doing fine. I'm exhausted. When I took on this role, I knew I would have to keep doing what I was doing. I figure but now I'm going to have two jobs. I'm going to have to do my work and take care of her. Well, it's not two jobs. It's four jobs. I have to do my work, I have to take care of her, oh, I didn't think about this, I have to do her work, and, by the way, I have to take care of me. I'm exhausted. These are seasons of life. This is just the way it goes.

Then, down in verse nine, Solomon asked this question, "What does the worker gain from his toil?" To the man who pleases God, he gives wisdom, happiness, and knowledge. It's pleasing to God to allow us to do work and find satisfaction in that toil, but what do we gain? We get to do this work and to eat, drink, and find happiness in it, but what do we gain? What do we get out of this? Verse 10, "I have seen the burden God has laid on men." That's not the first time we've seen that. When Solomon decided to study and explore everything that was done under heaven, he said, "What a heavy burden God has laid on men." We see, first of all, that God does lay burdens on men, but then the next thing, "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men. Yet, they can not fathom what God has done from the beginning to the end."

Sometimes you have a burden. Other times, you have something beautiful going on in your life. At all times, you can not fathom what's going on because of this God who put eternity in our hearts. We can't fathom what he's done from beginning to end. We have these good things and these bad things going on. I have a friend in Texas who planted a vineyard. For five years, he tended this vineyard, he and his wife. Finally, it got to a point where it was about to actually go into production and make some money for them. Then, one Saturday, it rained all day long for 28 inches, and he and his wife kept walking further and further up high ground. By the time the day was done, their vineyard was under five feet of water, completely ruined. It looked like it was going to be a beautiful season, and then suddenly it's torn apart. I loved his attitude, though. It was almost like Job, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." He understood that God controls the seasons. God controls these times.

Then, we see that right now in this chapter, "We can add nothing to what God does nor take anything away." This next couple of verses, "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 all his toil. This is a gift of God." This question that Solomon was asking, "What is it that's worthwhile for a man to do during his few days?" Well, that Hebrew word is used three times in this verse. I know that there is nothing more worthwhile, same Hebrew word, for men to do than to be happy and to do good or to do that which is worthwhile, again, same Hebrew word, while they live, that every man may eat and drink and find satisfaction or find that which is worthwhile. Same Hebrew word three times in this one verse. It's a gift from God when that happens. He goes on. "I know that everything 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." You have this perspective that Solomon is giving us.

I remember the movie Antz. Do any of you remember the movie Antz? It's like 1998, but it was the first computer-generated animated movie. Woody Allen played the hero ant. I think it was Sharon Stone played his girlfriend or something as the girlfriend ant. They run away. They're looking for Insectopia, which is like it's our utopia. It's like they're looking for heaven. They go all kinds of obstacles. Finally, they find Insectopia, whatever it is, Antopia. They find it. You know what it is? It's a garbage can in Central Park in New York City. That is, for them, utopia. That's what they've been searching for. I feel like the perspective Solomon is helping us understand is that we're rummaging around in a garbage can

thinking this is utopia. This is just a garbage can in Central Park. He's giving us the perspective that God has set eternity in our hearts for a reason. God frustrates these plans that we have to find this utopia, as he did for Solomon, and nothing that we do can add to anything God has done, and nothing we can do will take anything away from what God has done. What this Bible verse is telling us is that God sovereign. God is absolutely in control of his creation.

Now, there are many different aspects of God. This is just one of them. There's a Hindu story about six blind men who come up to an elephant. One goes up and he feels the side of the elephant, and he said, "An elephant is like a wall." Partially true. One of the other blind men goes up and grabs the tusk. He said, "No, no, no, no. An elephant is like a spear." Another blind man grabs ahold of his ear and he goes, "No, no, no. The elephant is like a fan." Another one grabs the trunk. He said, "No, no, no. An elephant is like a snake." Another one grabs a leg and said, "No, no, no. An elephant is like a tree." Another one grabs the tail and says, "No, no, no. An elephant is like a piece of rope." When we, you and I, finite beings, creatures, come to God, we're looking at God kind of like the blind men were looking at the elephant. What we see is God in part. When we talk about one part of God, let's remember there are many other things. God is loving. God is gracious. God is holy. He's omnipotent, omniscient, all these things. In this passage, God is sovereign.

Why does it happen that God structures his creation so that everything he does will endure and nothing can be added to it and nothing can be taken from it? It's so that you and I will revere him or fear him or worship him, have reverence for him. That's the Big Idea for the day. **"God will not force you to revere him, but he will make it impossible for you to be happy unless you do"**. God will not force you to revere him. He's given you freewill. I personally consider my freewill to be a curse. I would rather not have it, but God has given us freewill, but then he sovereignly orchestrates the seasons, the times, this rhythm of life. He does it in such a way that nothing can be added to what he does and nothing can be taken away. He does this so that, of our own freewill, we will turn to him and revere him. God doesn't force us to revere him. He's given us freewill, but he's going to make it impossible for us to be happy unless we do it.

GOD TESTS US SO WE CAN SEE WHAT WE ARE LIKE

Now, we see next how God tests us so that we can see what we're like. From verse 15 down to 17, quickly, "Whatever is has already been and what will be has been before. God will call the past to account. I saw something else under the sun. In the place of judgment, wickedness was there. In the place of justice, wickedness was there. I thought in my heart, 'God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed. He controls the seasons.'" Then in verse 18, "I also thought, 'As for men, God tests,'" or another interpretation of this word would be sifts. God sifts men. God tests men so that he can see what they are like. Doesn't say that, does it? He already knows what we are like. It says that God sifts us so that we can see what we are like, that we are like the animals.

"Man's fate is like that of the animals. The same fate awaits them both. As one dies, the other. All have the same breath. Man has no advantage over the animals. Everything is meaningless," he says, "All go to the same place. All come from dust and to all dust return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" I mean, do animals go to heaven? Nobody knows. "I saw there is nothing better for man than to enjoy his work because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?" Why does God test us? Why does he test us? He tests us so that we can see what is inside of us. Sometimes we need a burden. What a burden God has put on

men. Sometimes a burden is given to us not as a curse but to keep us from marching to our own destruction.

A lot of times, we are on paths that are going to end up in our own destruction. In his grace, God gives us a burden. I mean, I told a story a few weeks ago. I kind of told it like it was somebody else about a man who was taking four hours in the morning, he had some kind of a disease was taking him four hours to get going in the morning. That was me. I've over it. I'm seven weeks by it now, but for 14 months, I had to, most of the day, keep myself wrapped in an electric blanket. My shoulders and hips ached so much that they put on Prednisone. I was on Prednisone 14 months. I'm actually still in the process of tapering off the Prednisone. I'm almost off. I had what they thought was some sort of an undiagnosed autoimmune disease. My PCP sent me to a rheumatologist. Rheumatologist couldn't figure out what's going on. I went to Mayo in January. Mayo saved my brother's life, but they couldn't do anything for me. Then, I ended up at Shands Hospital.

Seven weeks ago, the doctor said, "We're going to try something different. Why don't you just stop all supplements and get yourself off Lipitor?" Lipitor is really, besides my headache medicine, those are the only two medicines have taken. They took me off Lipitor. Bam, a week later, I'm starting to get better. A week after that, another quantum leap. Incrementally, I've been getting better every week for seven weeks. It's phenomenal. I'm starting to feel like my old self. Now, the Lord is, for some reason, allowed me to be who I am every Friday here. I don't know where that strength has come from. That's crazy. Anyway, the bottom line is that I'm okay with that. God decided to give me that burden, and I'm okay with that. I trust him. I will never know all the things that he was doing inside of me, all the things that I was doing that he felt like he needed to do this in my life, but sometimes God's going to give you a burden. That's just the way it is.

Other times, he's going to give you what does it say over in verse 12? "Nothing better to be happy, to do good while you live, that every man would eat and drink and find satisfaction in all his toil." This is what? That's a gift. Both the burden and the blessing are the beautiful things. Those are both blessings. Those are both gifts from God for different reasons, leading us to a different place. This is why God is testing us. He's doing it for our benefit. He's doing it because he loves us. He's doing this because he wants the best for each of us. There's one man I've had on my mind all week. I just wish that he could be here. If he was here, he's so embroiled in his burden that I don't think he would be able to even comprehend what we're talking about this morning, but it's just so transparent to me. I could be wrong, but it seems to me, at least, transparently that he's got it all wrong. He's going through such a burden, and he's just convinced that ... Well, getting a little bit ahead of myself. The Big Idea today is this. **"God will not force you to revere him, but he will make it impossible for you to be happy unless you do"**.

A TALE OF THREE SONS

Now I want to tell you a tale of three sons. Just imagine that you're a father and you have three sons. You decide to do something good for them. You decide to bless them. You decide to give them this gift of happiness, of eating and drinking and finding satisfaction in their toil. These three sons you have have three different responses. The first son's response is, "I deserve this. This happened because of my hard work." Certainly contributed, right? But, "I deserve this. What's going on in my life, I earned it. It's mine." I haven't been able to think of the perfect illustration. Somebody can probably think of a better analogy than this, but the one I did think of is me as a father staying up all night Christmas Eve and wrapping all the presents, putting all the toys together, and arranging all the Christmas lights to come on in the morning.

Then, my son gets up. This is fictitious because my son never did this, but my son, I left one thing undone, and that is to plug the lights into the wall socket. I've stayed up all night long, and I've done all this work, and I've put all these toys together, and I've been working to earn money for months and months to make this happen, and not to mention all the things that my wife has done too. My son gets up and I say, "Son, go ahead and put in the light thingamajigger into the socket." He pushes the plug into the light socket and all of a sudden, the house springs to life inside and out. Lights everywhere. He looks up and he says, "Dad, I did it." That's the first son. "I did it. Look what I did," as though ... You get it.

The second son, he gets blessed and his paradigm is that he feels so guilty and so ashamed for how he's lived his life. God does something good. God gives him a gift, and he says, "I don't deserve this," and he really doesn't think he deserves it, not in the sense of the fact that none of us deserve it, it's all grace, but that he's so riddled with shame and guilt that he, really, he can't even accept it. In fact, sometimes he will even sabotage his own success. This person I was talking about before, that's what he's been doing. He's been sabotaging his own success. The third son, something good happens to him, he gets the gift of God, the father gives him the gift, and his response is reverence. "I appreciate this so much." He has a spirit of humility, a spirit of reverence. He reveres his father for giving him the gift. He's so grateful for the gift and he says, "Father, I don't know why you've given this to me, but I trust you. I'm going to do my very best with what you've given to me." On another occasion, the father decides to test, to sift his three sons so that they can see what is in them. He gives them a burden.

The first son who said of the good thing, "I deserve this," when the bad thing happens, he says, "I don't deserve this. This is not fair. Look at my record. Look at all the performance, all the good deeds that I've done for you, Father. You've never asked me to do anything. I've said, no, I don't deserve this." The second son who, when something good happened to him, he said, "I don't deserve this," when something bad happens, he says, "This is what I deserve. I deserve this," because of the guilt and the shame. Guess what. Both are different forms of legalism, just two different kinds of legalism. The third son, his response when something good happened was, "Father, I appreciate what you are doing in my life. I trust you." His response when something bad happens is exactly the same when something bad happens as it was when something good happened, "Father I don't know what the purpose of this is, but I trust you and I worship you. In humility, I revere you for what's going on in my life."

Now, you're the father. Which of these three children do you love the most? It's a false dilemma because God loves all three of these sons equally. That is why he is not a God who has disengaged himself from his creation. That is why he is a God who creates a time for everything and a season for every event under heaven because of his enormous love for us. He's engaged with us, giving us the gift of something beautiful when that's the right season for us or the gift of a burden when that's the right season for us because of his grace, because of his mercy, because of his love. This is the secret of happiness. It's to understand that God has you, that God is in control. It's to be like the third son whose response when he receives a blessing is the same as his response when he has to go through a hard time.

That doesn't mean you don't mourn, you don't grieve, you don't pound the fists with your table, you don't curse, you don't say, "Why me?" I mean, okay, all that still is part of the deal, but at the end of the day, the idea is this humble reverence for God. God's not going to force us to revere him, but he is going to make it impossible for us to be happy unless we do. Let's pray. Our Father, Lord, wow. This book of Ecclesiastes is so amazing and so much more positive and helpful than it first appears to be. You've actually given us, through Solomon, a secret of a happy life. That is to understand that nothing we do can add to what you have already done or take away from what you've already done so that we might

revere you and thus be happy. I pray that each of these men, that this would be the one idea that, fully understood and truly believed, could change everything for them. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.