

Solomon's Twelve Secrets

Session 5: Even If You Can Get Rich, Only God Can Make You Happy

Edited Transcript

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Well, good morning, men. Please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter five. Why don't we get started with a shout out? Today's shout out is going to be to the **Men's Discipleship Support Group**. This is a new group. Richard Moore is the leader, Morgantown, West Virginia. Six men literally just starting on Saturday mornings at 7:00 AM at the Morgantown Church of Christ. Richard says, "We help men overcome addictions, become disciples rather than just attenders, leaders in their families, and then mature leaders for the community of the church." I wonder if you would join me in giving a very warm and rousing and sensational, spectacular welcome to the Men's Disciple Support Group. One, two, three, hoorah. Men, we're honored to have you as part of our Bible study. Welcome. We love to have new groups.

This is the series Solomon's 12 Secrets: Lessons on Life from Ecclesiastes. Every now and then, I tell a cut through story about our house. Some of you who have been here for a while know that my home has entrances on two streets. It's sort of like a connector between two neighborhoods, and people use it as such. I used to tell cut through stories about every other week, but I was starting to get a bad reputation here at the Bible study for not having any other funny stories, and so I stopped telling cut through stories except occasionally. Now, what I do is I wait until I have a really, really good cut through story. Last one I told you was about a school bus that got beached, stuck in my yard trying to turn around in my yard. Well, this week I drove up to North Carolina and back to pick up our travel trailer.

We have a little shelter next to the house. I pulled into our driveway late Tuesday night, got back about 10:00 PM. Rather than putting the RV in the shelter, I just left it in the driveway with the idea that I would wash the RV and get all the bugs off the next morning before I put it in the shelter. The next day I was getting out on Wednesday, getting all my equipment together on the side of the house, and I looked, and I sort of parked the RV abruptly. Some of the wheels were over on the grass and starting to get into the plants. Then, all of a sudden, I looked out of the corner of my eye, and I saw some movement. There were two women starting to do the cut through on our house. I looked over and the lead woman, I noticed, is a woman that lives on Franklin Avenue and I, for over 25 years, have been trying to get her to make eye contact or say hello or respond to one of my verbal greetings or one of my waves. This is the woman who's ignored me for 25 years. I look over, and she apparently had seen me and so had the woman behind her.

You know why I know this? Because they looked like my dog the day he had pulled a pizza off the top of our counter, like really looking guilty. She was looking like she knew she had done something wrong or was doing something wrong. I couldn't help myself. I said, "What are you doing?" She says, "Well, I just live over on Franklin." I wanted to say, "So what's your point? I live here. You live on Franklin. What's your point?" Literally, men, she would have had to walk through my flowerbeds because the trailer had

blocked the driveway so much that she would have had to go off and walk through plants. Fortunately, the woman that was with her had enough common sense to say, "Oh, that's okay. We'll go around." I said, "Well, that would be a much appreciated idea. You know, my little dog does go crazy every time you walk through here. We know when you're coming." That's the cut through story. Really, I could give you a cut through story every week. You realize this, but I don't.

The thing about that that's interesting, how am I going to tie that into the talk, is that what happens is that we all construct these narratives. These narratives that we construct are either to understand and reflect that which is true or sometimes to justify ourselves. What Solomon is doing is he's giving us the understanding of the narratives that will lead to a meaningful life over guess what he also in here calls a meaningless life. Solomon is really contrasting a meaningless life with a meaningful life. He's showing us how to do that. Today, we're going to get to this topic, which I'm excited about. Even if you can get rich, only God can make you happy. Now, one more thing. In theology, you know, I'm trained in that, in theology, we say that the final and infallible rule of authority for all matters of faith and life is the Bible. That's kind of like a pretty basic idea in theological training, that the Bible is the final rule for all matters of faith and life.

If you're going to talk about matters of faith to me, you might have your own favorite. My favorite is the gospel of John because it's talking constantly about believing in Jesus, the deity of Jesus. Who is Jesus? When you think about all matters of faith, for me, I love the gospel of John, but you can read the gospel of John until you're blue in the face, and you're not going to get all that you need for life. You're going to get more than enough for heaven, but you're not going to get all that you need for life. Now, the Bible is like the complete owner's manual. I have, for my car, an owner's manual. It's 477 pages. I just want to go to the Winter Park Community Center so we can talk about the Bible and maybe drive to the grocery store, drive my wife to the grocery store. I don't need 477 pages.

They know this at the manufacturer and so they have what is called a quick start guide, a couple of pages. This is all I need to be able to do what I really want to do in the car unless, of course, I have a problem. Well, the gospel of John is a quick start guide for all matters of faith. It takes the whole owner's manual. You can find out what you need for life in the quick start guide, the gospel of John, for faith. The beautiful thing about Ecclesiastes is that it is the quick start guide for all matters of life. God has given Solomon this incredible wisdom to consolidate it down, to compress it down, to distill it down to the essence. He gives us a quick start guide for all matters of life.

As we get into today's topic, we're going to be talking about mostly money, which is like how much of life is taken up by money or the need for money or spending money or how do use money. That would be a good thing to know. We're going to start by talking about what money will do and will not do.

WHAT WILL MONEY DO AND NOT DO?

What will money do and not do? If you are at Ecclesiastes chapter five, the first seven verses deal with two topics, which we're not going to do. We're just going to brush on these. It starts out, "Guard your steps when you go the house of God." It says to go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools. Don't be quick with your mouth. Verse three, "As dreams come when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words." This is about our speech and our listening.

Really, it doesn't say this, but we did say that one of the big ideas, one of the secrets of Solomon is that God will not force you to revere him, but he will make it impossible for you to be happy unless you do. Then, the question might be, the unspoken question that this text is answering here is: What does reverence look like? If we can't be happy without revering God, well, what does that then look like? Solomon is telling us here what it looks like to revere God. Don't talk so much. Listen more. I've given this advice to a few men who need it. As a friend, I will sometimes say, picking the right moment, of course, because there's no greater loss than the right advice given at the wrong moment. Talk half as much. Listen twice as much. When we're with God, what basically Solomon is saying is, "Hey, why don't you talk less and listen more?" Then, it says, really, it says over at the end of verse seven, "Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore, stand in awe of God." This is the lesson on awe.

Then, we come to verse eight. He starts talking about money. "If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields." By the way, I mean, who's the king? He's the king. I profit from the fields. Then, we come to this idea of, "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what good are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep."

What will money do? Well, it will do a lot of things. I mean, when you're paying for your gas, the cashier isn't looking for a gospel track. They want a charge card. Money's extremely important and valuable, and money is a hand of providence. It's not the only hand of providence, but money is a hand of providence. God uses money to move us around on the chessboard. Money is useful, of course. It gives, first of all, the ability to have some money gives us dignity. It gives the dignity of being able to pay our bills on time. Money gives us the dignity to put shelter, a roof over our heads and the heads of our families. Money allows us to be able to have a family, to educate them, to clothe them, to send them to school. It allows us to buy groceries, healthcare insurance, transportation. Money is extremely important. Money will do many, many things. Money is a gift from God, but, as we see in this text, there's some things that money won't do too.

Below a certain level, money creates all kinds of problems, but above a certain level, money also creates a lot of problems. That's what we see in the text. "As goods increase, so do those who consume them. Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income." More, more, more, more. "As goods increase, so do those who consume them." Any of you who have ever had money know the more money you have, the more people want your money? "What benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?" How many people do you know who have two, maybe three homes that are usually money pits but don't get to use them? They can feast their eyes on them, but they don't really ever use them. Now, I'm not saying anything negative about those things because I've got a travel trailer. What does it do most of the time? It sits, right? Yeah, it blocks the driveway, exactly. I should just leave that in the driveway now that I think about it and then stop the cut throughs.

Let me ask you this question. We read this text, love money, don't have enough, love wealth, never satisfied, goods increase, what benefit, the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep. Let me ask you this question with regard to money. Do you really believe this? Not theoretically believe this, but if you were to look at how you actually spend your time and what you think about, would those thoughts and a look at your calendar really reflect that you really believe this? When Jesus says, I'm paraphrasing, don't worry about what you're going to eat or drink or wear because your Father in heaven knows you

need all these things, but, instead, seek him, seek his kingdom, and he's going to take care of everything you need. That's the flip side of that. When you read that in Matthew six, do you really believe this?

I've always loved Ecclesiastes. Somehow, in my first year of becoming a Christian, I got exposed to the book of Ecclesiastes and I really resonated with it then and still do. I would read that particular text, and I really didn't believe it. I mean, I really didn't believe it. I said even if it is true, I'd like to find out for myself. You know, I came by that thought, not through some evil plot, but because my philosophy of life when I became a Christian was, and you perhaps have heard me say this before, my philosophy of life was that money will solve my problems and success will make me happy. I was devoted to that idea. If I could just make enough money, then I would be happy. Money will solve my problems. It will make me happy. Success will make me happy. I mean, I really poured myself into that, but for some people, their problem is, their frustration is is they don't get what they want. My problem was I did get what I wanted.

It's interesting. The emotions of getting what you want and not getting what you want are very similar because even though I met every goal I ever set, and it was a good economy so that is mostly good economy, but I was meeting all the goals, and I felt just like Solomon felt. That's why I like Ecclesiastes, because everything felt meaningless. I've come to call this and I like to reteach this periodically to you because I think it's a valuable lesson. I caught the disease that we will call success sickness. How many of you have heard me talk about success sickness before? See, this is why I like to talk about it from time to time. Success sickness is the disease of always wanting more and then never being happy when you get it. That's what Solomon's talking about right here, the disease of always more, more, more, more, but then never being happy when you get it.

We know that failure means to not get what you want, right? I think we could also come up with another definition of failure and we could also say that failure means to get exactly what you want only to find out that it didn't really matter, that it was meaningless, a chasing after the wind. This is what money will and will not do. It will meet all of these needs, but it will never satisfy the deepest longings of our heart for a true meaning in life. Most men, nobody here of course, but most men revere money because they think it will do what it won't. They get bewitched by money, perhaps even make it into an idol and worship it. Instead of standing in awe of God, they stand in awe of money. They become lukewarm. They become cultural Christians.

This is the Big Idea for the day. Wow. You ready? Boom. **Most men think money will do what it won't and that God won't do what he will.** Most men think that money will do what it won't. They just do. They think it will satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts for meaning, purpose, and so forth. Then, on the flip side of that, and Solomon's going to talk about it here in the next verses, they don't think that God will do what he will do. Let's look at that as well. There are a few more verses there in Ecclesiastes five about hoarding wealth and not taking anything with you when you die, no trailer hitch on hearses and that kind of thing. Down in verse 18, next circle, what will God do and not do? We talked about what money will do and not do. Now, let's talk about what God will do and not do.

WHAT WILL GOD DO AND NOT DO?

Verse 18, "Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him, for this is his lot." That's a mouthful. We've seen this before in Ecclesiastes already. "Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work, this is a gift

of God." I was talking with two men just before we got started. I've never been able in my whole life ... The one thing that still upsets me all the time about worldview and making Christianity fit is the idea of how blessed I am and a million Syrian refugees who are starving to death or famines in the horn of African or two million people being killed by a dictator or right now in our world, all these people, you see them on the news in long, long lines with all their worldly possessions on their backs. I just have never been able to reconcile. I'm certainly not going to do anything more than introduce it as a problem now. I just don't understand it. I do know this.

This little quick start guide, Ecclesiastes, on life, it does say this about my situation and your situation. "Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work," which I am and I hope you are too. If you're not, you can ask for this. Jesus said, "What father, if the son asks him for a loaf of bread," or whatever it is, "is going to give him a scorpion?" Or an egg, is going to give him an egg or a fish. I don't even remember the text. It just came up off the top of my head. Anyway, is going to give him something bad. What son who asks his father for a good gift, what father is going to give him a bad gift? You can ask God to make you into the kind of person that could receive this gift. Verse 20, "He seldom reflects on the days of his life." Doesn't mean he never reflects. I don't spend all my days thinking about what I just said. I do reflect on it from time to time, and maybe I should do it more, I don't know, but the text says, "He seldom reflects on the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart."

Now, this gladness of heart is the same glad, the Hebrew word here for gladness, the root word for that glad in the Hebrew is the same glad that's in Psalm 118:24, "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be," what? Glad in it. I think sometimes we throw the baby out with the bathwater. Where did we get this idea that Christianity is supposed to be this brutal, hard, terrible, horrible thing that we have to endure until we can get to heaven? I think one reason we throw the baby out with the bathwater is that there is an allergic reaction to a prosperity gospel, so when you hear that some people are talking about Christianity as be happy, happy, happy all the time, there's an overreaction to that. There is some sense in which you can see that God wants to give us this gift. He wants us to reflect on the days of his life seldomly because God keeps him satisfied or occupied with gladness of heart.

Men don't revere God because they think that money will do what it won't. Now, we see also raising the possibility that men don't revere God because they don't think that God will do what he will. How many of you really believe this? I asked you how many of you really believed the verses on money. How many of you really believe this text? That is really something. If you want a takeaway for the day is to really get your mind around these two ideas, the idea that as goods increase, so do those who consume them and all that, then also this idea that God has this gift that's available. That's what God will do. He will do this. What God will not do is he will not give us money and success at the expense of our soul. "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul?" Jesus asks. Sometimes we will find our circumstances turned upside down for reasons we don't understand, but sometimes we will find our circumstances turned upside down because God is more interested in the success of our character than he is in the success of our circumstances.

Now, I've just shown and I think thoroughly proved through God's word that God is incredibly interested in the success of your circumstances but never at the expense of your character. Sometimes God frustrates our plans in order to, as any loving father would to a child, there's no loving father that will not discipline a child whose narrative is a little off, who says, "I just live over on Franklin." Dad just isn't going to let you get away with that. All right. The big idea, again, today: Most men think that money will

do what it won't and God won't do what he will. Just to wrap it up, let's ask: So what? Now what? And what's the takeaway?

SO WHAT? NOW WHAT? THE TAKEAWAY

I was on the phone one day with one of the friends of our ministry, lives in a different city, and he asked this question. He said, "Pat, how happy should I be in my work?" Bill, not real name, Bill said ...

Well, let me tell you a little bit about Bill. Bill was the executive vice president at the time of this conversation, executive vice president of an 800 employee privately held company, and he was the number three person. Part of his portfolio was HR. He had had this incredible impact on the morale of the company. He had implemented many different health benefits that previously had not existed, some retirement plans for the company and so forth. He's deeply and highly respected in the company, but he didn't feel like he was getting the meaning in life that he hoped that he would. In other words, it wasn't satisfying. It wasn't, as Solomon was looking for what is worthwhile for a man to do, he didn't feel like it was worthwhile. I said, "Bill, let me ask you a question." He said, "Okay." I said, "Are you serving the Lord?" Long silent period. I'm a salesman so I didn't talk first.

Bill said, "Well, it's very interesting because three years ago, I was actually leading a men's Bible study, but when I took over this new position in the company, I've been so busy I've stopped doing that. Now that you mention it, I realize I really haven't done anything to serve the Lord in three years." This is what I said to Bill and I will say this to you if you're not finding satisfaction in your toilsome labor under the sun, if you don't feel like you're experiencing the gift of God. God has four universal purposes for all men. Love God, love people, and then what we call the cultural mandate, which is taking care of culture, taking care of our businesses and our families, and the Great Commission, which means helping people understand the gospel and walk with Jesus. Bill was doing a great job loving God, great job loving people, great job in the cultural mandate, working in this business, making all these fine changes that were helping families throughout the community live better lives, but when it came to the Great Commission, he had stopped serving the Lord.

I said, "Bill," because he was looking around. He had already starting interviewing. He was thinking about starting his own business. I said, "Bill, I just want to offer a suggestion. I don't know for sure. I mean, this could be God leading you away from that position, but with all the equity that you have with those people and that company and all the goodwill you've created, I wonder if you might not be trying to solve the wrong problem. You're looking for meaning in life. May I make a suggestion? Why don't you start serving the Lord again and do that for six months? Then, if at the end of six months you still feel like your life does not have meaning and you still feel like you need to make a change in your work, go ahead and do that. Bill, what I'm concerned about right now is that you might, because you're not serving the Lord, you might be solving the wrong problem. You might end up changing positions and still be feeling life is just as meaningless as it does to you right now." He agreed to do that.

The takeaway here is just make sure if you feel like your life is meaningless in any way or a chasing after the wind in any way, just make sure that you solve the right problem because one narrative is that men will think that money will do it, and it won't, but that God won't do what he will. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for this quick start guide we have here, Ecclesiastes. This really is quite an amazing book. Father, you know each of us in this room better than we know ourselves. You know the narratives that we have chosen. Lord, help us to each think through those narratives by superimposing the narrative of your holy scripture over our lives so that we might see truth and not just justify

ourselves. Lord, for those of us who do need to review our thinking on money, what money will do and not do, and what you will do and not do, I pray that you would give us wisdom this morning. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.