

Solomon's Twelve Secrets

Session 6: Solomon's Great Secret of Contentment

Edited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Good morning, men. We are in a series called Solomon's 12 Secrets: Lessons on Life From the Book of Ecclesiastes. As we begin, as we do each week, we want to offer a shout out. By the way, to those of you who are receiving the shout out today and all the others who've ever received shout out or have yet to receive a shout out, when you're in Orlando, come by and see us. We're very personable group, and I would love to have a chance to meet you personally. If you let me know a little bit in advance, maybe we can work out going to breakfast as well after the Bible study. With that said, we do have a shout out this morning. It's to the Rock Solid Men of East Union Baptist Church who got involved with Man in the Mirror through a former area director that we love, Michael Horner. Rock Solid Men, eight guys, they've been meeting every other Saturday at 8:00 AM at the church for two years. Allen Castleman is the leader. He says, "Our goal is to bring men together for growth in God, faith, and discipleship." Good goal, Allen. They are located in Jackson, Tennessee. I wonder if you would join me in giving a very warm, rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to Rock Solid Men. Yeah. One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome, guys. We are honored to have you with us.

Also, I want to welcome Blake. We have a new videographer starting with us today. Hey, Blake. Then, we are in this series, as I say, Solomon's 12 Secrets. We're coming to Ecclesiastes chapter six this morning. The title of the message is Solomon's Great Secret of Contentment. We ended last week by talking about how when a man has prosperity and can accept his lot in life and is able to enjoy that, that this is a gift from God. Then, we come to chapter six, and we see a problem, a new scenario. Verse one, "I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men. God gives a man wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires." Have you ever been to that place where you really lack nothing that your heart desires? This message is for you, sucker. If I have a little bit too much eye contact with you this morning, you'll understand why. "So that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God," he has all this, "but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless or futile, vanity, a grievous evil." It's even more than just vanity. He's even going on to call it an evil. Remember three forces, good, evil, and then futile, something that just doesn't seem like it makes any difference. This is even an evil.

Verse three, "A man may have a hundred children," this is hyperbole, except for Solomon. "A man may have a hundred children and live many lives; yet no matter how long he lives, if he can not enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say a stillborn child is better off than he. It comes without meaning. It departs in darkness, and in darkness his name is shrouded. Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?" Well, actually, no, they don't, but we all leave the same way.

WHY WOULD A MAN WHO HAS IT ALL CHOOSE NOT TO ENJOY IT?

Question for the day here is: Why would a man who has it all choose not to enjoy it? Why would a man who has all this prosperity, all this wealth, all these possessions not take advantage of that and enjoy his lot in life? Why would he let contentment elude him? This is what Solomon is going to help us get after here today.

The answer is in the next verse, verse seven. "All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied." His appetite is like a raging fire that always craves more fuel, more wood. No matter how much God gives him the gift, the possessions, the wealth, the honor, the riches, it's never just enough to satisfy him. He always wants a little more. He actually is choosing not to enjoy his lot in life. Now, there are other reasons that people suffer, and we are not talking about those today. You know, if one of your family members gets killed by a drunk driver, that's not what we're talking about here, or if you have your identity stolen, that's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about the man who has received the gift of God, the blessing, but somehow just has decided, "Another X amount of dollars and then I would feel secure." How does God provide to solve this problem? Well, let's read on, a couple of verses.

"What advantage has a wise man over a fool? What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others?" Well, you might think that Solomon is saying that there is no advantage. That's exactly not what he's saying. These are not just rhetorical questions. There is an advantage that a wise man has over a fool. He handles his money better. He handles his relationships better. Then, "What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others?" Well, quite a lot, actually. He's able to rise in life. The story of Dr. Ben Carson, for example, comes to mind. Then, to verse nine where we catch, that's a sidebar, but to verse nine. The question is: How does God provide to solve this problem of having an appetite that is not satisfied, that is not content with your lot in life? "Better," and this is the same word that Solomon used. Remember, Solomon was trying to answer the question, he said, "I sought to find out what is it that is worthwhile to do under heaven during the few days that God has given us." It's that word worthwhile. It's what is good, what is better, what is worthwhile. It's that exact same Hebrew word here.

"Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite." I like this best personally in the New Living Translation which says, "Enjoy what you have rather than desiring what you don't have." Enjoy your lot in life. We have here these two men contrasted, if you will, one who is driven by his appetite. He's never satisfied. His eyes are never satisfied, and so he's never content, even though God has given him all of this to enjoy. Then, we have this other man who, and we don't even know if this other man has been given all of this tremendous gift that the first guy has. The second guy, "Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite." He's decided to enjoy what he has rather than desiring what he doesn't have. That brings us, gentlemen, to the Big Idea for the day. It's Solomon's great secret of contentment is revealed right here, right before you this very day, before your watching eyes. Are you ready? Ladies and gentlemen, once and for all, Solomon's great secret of success, **the great secret of contentment is not getting what you want, but wanting what you get.** That's it. That's Solomon's great secret. It's not getting what you want, the appetite that can't be satisfied, always a little bit more. It's wanting what you get. It's believing that God ... Getting a little bit ahead of myself.

TWO REASONS TO BE CONTENT WITH WHAT YOU HAVE

Now, what I want us to do is, next, I want us to look. Everybody got that that wants it? The next thing I want us to look at two reasons to be content with what you have that Solomon is giving us here in this text. Are there others? Of course there are, but Solomon gives us two reasons. One is found in verse nine, which we just read, "Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." What is meaningless, a chasing after the wind? It's the roving eye. When your eye roves, you will not be satisfied. It is futile. The first reason to be content with what you have is because it is futile, it is meaningless to want what you don't have. You may get that, you may end up with it, but it's futile to let the energy of your life be sucked out because of wanting something that you don't have. Now, what about the man who doesn't have it all? Well, it's great.

Solomon's not saying it's not worthwhile to set goals for things that you might want to have, but what he is saying is that if you're not content now, you're not going to be content then either. The issue is not what you have. The issue is getting control of your appetite or surrendering your appetite. The issue is not how much you have or don't have. The issue is wanting what you don't have and not being able to control your appetite now for it. Set goals, sure, but if you're not content now, you're not going to be happy when you get that because you haven't dealt with the real issue, the appetite. Paul said this perhaps better than anybody. If you want to, you can go there with me to Philippians chapter four. I'm using the paper Bible on this one. In Philippians chapter four verses 11B, the second half of 11, Paul says, "For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

What is his secret? "I can do everything through him," Jesus Christ. "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." How do you get control of your appetite? You don't, but Jesus Christ in you can change you and transform you. The first reason to be content is that it's futile to want what you don't have. It leads to a sense of meaningless. The second reason is in the 10th verse, which reads, "Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known. No man can contend with one who is stronger than he." Now, I, again, prefer the New Living Translation on this verse. Let me read that to you in the New Living Translation. It's much more clear. I mean, obviously, if it's meant to communicate the same thing, two different versions, you could get to the same conclusion by reading what I just read. However, you don't have to struggle because the NLT just says it just so well. Are you ready? "Everything has already been decided. It was known long ago what each person would be, so there's no use arguing with God about your destiny."

Oops. I thought I was in charge of my life. Oops. Let me read that again, "Everything has already been decided. It was known long ago what each person would be, so there's no use arguing with God about your destiny." In other words, God has already scripted the larger narrative of your life. He's up in heaven. He's on his computer. He's sorting through his computer files. He says, "Hmm, I need more files. I think I'll open a new file." He clicks on "open new file" and a blank sheet of paper opens up. Then, he begins to type out of his imagination. He begins to write the larger script of your life. Now, one day he's going to close that file, and you will hopefully go to be with him when he closes that file, but it's going to be an open file. He's going to sovereignly write the larger narrative of your life. He's going to put in the Roman numerals and the capital As and the number ones, but there's going to be a lot of other things too.

He's going to give you freewill, and you can move about within that narrative that he's written, but there's only so much you can do with your freewill. You realize this, right? I mean, you can totally screw yourself, but, I mean, you can't do that ... Okay. You're not a sea lion, and you're not a jungle lion. You

didn't have much control over that. You don't live in the middle of the Amazon rainforest. Your looks were predetermined. You can't change your look. There's a new movie coming out with the old guy that played Mr. Bean. I mean, there's a guy who's capitalized on what he looks like, but, I mean, there's nothing that he could do to change that look, right? If you have slow reflexes, you're not going to be able to do reflex exercises and somehow all of a sudden be able to dunk. If you're athletic, there's nothing that you can do to take that away, but if you're not athletic, there's probably nothing you can do to be a professional hurdler like Daniel over here.

There are certain things about your life. The larger narrative of your life, that's set. Your ethnicity, for example, how tall you are, your aptitudes. If you can sell but can't count, you're not going to be an accountant. If you can count but can't sell, you're not going to be a salesman. There's some things in the larger narrative that are set. Let me read the text again, "Everything has already been decided." Does that mean like everything everything? When you read the word everything in literature, it's never always everything ever. Did you get that? When you see the word everything, it's like almost everything, and that's the way it is. I mean, God has decided who you are. He has determined the exact times and places where you will live. Thank God he's good. Oh my. What if God was not good? We would be in deep weeds. Solomon is showing us how we can live a life in concert with our lot, which is what we have been reading here throughout Solomon.

They were able to accept their lot in life. Have you been able to accept your lot in life? Have you been able to accept the larger narrative of your life? The big idea, the great secret of contentment is not getting what you want, it's wanting what you get. Now, that doesn't mean we don't move around inside of this and we don't try to improve our situations. We do, but your Heavenly Father knows what you need before you even ask him, says Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Your Father in heaven knows what you need before you even ask him. I think, and I said it back here with a couple of guys here, there is this idea that Solomon is trying to break away at, to crack the husk on this in our minds. A lot of us become Christians and we think if it's not hard, it must not be God. You know what I'm saying? If it's not hard, it must not be God. Well, sometimes it is hard and it is God, but that's not the norm. The norm is that he wants to give his children whom he loves this gift, but we screw it up because we let our appetites run wild, and we're not getting what we want instead of wanting what we get.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM SOLOMON THAT CAN CHANGE OUR LIVES?

Final piece of this then, what have we learned from Solomon here that can change our lives? What have we learned in this text from Solomon that can change our lives? Well, I think there are two opportunities, and it's a choice. It's just an elemental, foundational choice. Are we going to embrace the larger narrative, our lot in life, and live like sons? Are we going to live like much-loved sons or are we going to rail against how God has made us, be frustrated, want to be somebody else, want to be somewhere else, want to have more, whatever it is, and live like orphans? Are you going to live like a son or are you going to live like an orphan? It's a very simple choice. It's elementary. It's foundational. It's fundamental. If we learn anything here from Solomon that can change our lives, it's this idea. Enjoy what you have rather than desiring what you don't have. Learn the secret of contentment. There it is.

Now, I'd like to do that, but I'm not sure if I can trust him. If I let go like this and just don't try to help him, if I just let go, I'm not sure that I can trust him. I would like to believe that this is true, but when I look at my circumstances, it's hard not to have reservations. 2 Peter chapter three verses eight and nine says this, "Do not forget this one thing, dear friends. With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day." What is to us the excruciating minutiae of being in sub point IIIVII, really

down in the details of life, a thousand years to God is like a day and a day is like a thousand years. God is operating in Bible time. This is Bible time. Yes, Jesus died 2,000 years ago, but in another sense, in Bible time, he died the day before yesterday. It wasn't that long ago, and it won't be that long, the day after tomorrow, you're going to be with him. Actually, tomorrow, actually, this afternoon, in Bible time, you're going to be with him. These circumstances that we're so embalmed by ... Is that right? Would that be a good way of saying it? Bound up with, these circumstances that so paralyze us, they'll be gone by mid-afternoon, for some of you, by 10:00 AM.

A thousand years is like a day, and a day is like a thousand years. Verse nine, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." This is God's grace, letting us work all of this humanity out. It's messy. Yes, it's messy, but it's his desire. It doesn't mean everybody will. This is not his decreed will. He's not decreeing that everybody will repent, but it is not God's desire that anyone would perish, but that all would come to repentance. He's given us time to work all that. How do we work all that out? We come to Bible studies like this. We go to our churches. We meet in our small groups. We talk it through. We figure it out. What have we learned from Solomon that can change our lives? Accept that it is futility to want what we don't have. It's futility to want what we don't have. It's meaningless to want what we don't have.

Our daughter, when she was in college, she had a brand new Honda. I was driving a 10-year-old Honda. I'm thinking, "What's up with this?" Well, that's a father's love. Then, she graduated and went to work at Clemson University. Anybody here from Clemson University? She was with a campus ministry there. She was telling me one day, she said, "Dad, I need to figure out how to make some more money. I just need to do something to make more money." I just said to her, "Jen, go ahead and do that if you can, but I just want you to know, to help you set a realistic set of expectations, you're always going to feel that way. You're always, for the rest of your life, you're going to feel like, 'If I just had a little bit, I just need a little bit more money.' You're going to feel like that for the rest of your life unless you learn the secret of contentment, that contentment is not getting what you want, it's wanting what you get. It's learning to be satisfied that a good God who loves you is going to take care of you."

Solomon in all his glory, this is Solomon's book, Solomon in all his glory, you know, was not clothed like the lilies of the field. Don't worry about what you eat, drink, wear. God knows you need these things, and he's going to give them to you. Seek his kingdom. He'll take care of you. Accept this, that it's futile to keep wanting what you don't have. Then, number two, be content with that you do have. Jesus said in Luke chapter 12 verse 15, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." That's not where our life is. Accept the futility of wanting what you don't have, and be content with what you do have, and then, and this is so important, embrace God who, in love, has specifically scripted the larger narrative for your life and to do so with gratitude. To believe that the way that he uniquely knit you together in your mother's womb and to yield your life to him will return to you this gift from God, this ability to accept your lot in life.

My brothers, the great secret of contentment, again, the Big Idea for today, **the great secret of contentment is not getting what you want. It's wanting what you get.** Let's pray. Our dearest Father, we come humbly before you, recognizing that some of us are hearing this for the first time. Perhaps most of us are not hearing this for the first time. Lord, for those of us who have not heard this before, Lord, help us to embrace our lot in life and not be controlled by an appetite that's never satisfied. For those of us who have heard this before or learned this before, remind us, Lord, that often the most

difficult lessons to learn are the ones we already know. Reteach us through the power of your Holy Spirit and change our lives. We ask this, Jesus, in your name and through the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.