

Solomon's Twelve Secrets

Session 11: When You're Feeling Stuck

Edited Transcript

Brett Clemmer

Hey, let's continue in our series. We are 11 secrets in. This is the 11th secret for Solomon's 12 Secrets: Lessons on Life from Ecclesiastes. We're going to jump into Solomon's 12 Secrets. Before we do that, though, let's give a shout out to the Men of Integrity, a group of 10 men who have just started meeting. They use the video Bible studies at Sunday mornings at 9:00. We always ask, "Tell us a little bit about your group." This what they said, "We're a group of believers in Jesus Christ, and we want to sacrifice, serve, and be accountable." Sean Gregoire, if my eighth grade French is correct, that's how you pronounce that. Now, I'm also from Boston. I was so excited when I saw this shout out because what town is he from? What is it? No, it's not. It's Billerica. I don't know why. This is the state that has Worcester, but everybody else would pronounce it Worcester. It has a town called Peabody that everybody would call Peabody. This is Billerica, Massachusetts. This is the next town over from where I grew up in Lexington, Massachusetts. That's a trivia moment for you this morning. Billerica. Everybody say Billerica. Now you are all New Englanders.

Also, we want to give a shout out to a team member, Jeff Dionne. Keeping with the New England theme, Jeff's our regional director for the Northeast. He lives in Maine. This guy is just tearing it up in Maine with the men of Maine. He's got a huge area that he covers. Dozens and dozens of churches are being impacted by Jeff. We asked Jeff, "Why did you become an area director for Man in the Mirror?" He said, "Because a church softball team caused me to find and take the next steps on my spiritual journey. Because of that, I am passionate about equipping churches to help their men find and take their own next steps." Jeff Deon started as an area director. Now, he's a regional director, and he's got a bunch of area directors that he's helping to be more and more successful all across the Northeast and even down the East Coast. Oops, I hit the wrong thing. For Sean and for Jeff, let's give these guys a cheer. One, two, three, hoorah.

All right. Let's jump into Solomon's 12 Secrets here. Let me give you our outline for today. We're going to talk about when you're feeling stuck. Now, how many of you got the reminder email yesterday? Did you notice the topic of the email? It said, "When you're feeling stuck with Brett Clemmer." That's what it said. You're stuck with me this morning, so when you're feeling stuck. We're going to talk about three simple things when you're feeling stuck: diversify, move, and live. When you're feeling stuck, we're going to talk about three things from this chapter that are in Solomon's 12 Secrets. We're going to talk about Diversify, Move, and Live. Before that, I thought we'd play a little game. We're going to play a game called the Bible or Shakespeare. I'm going to give you a phrase and you tell me if it's from the Bible or if it's from Shakespeare. Are you ready?

Here's the first one. "Bite the dust." Shakespeare? How many say Shakespeare? Yeah, right? No, it's in the Bible. Psalm 72:9 has this phrase, bite the dust. It's not Queen. They stole it from Psalms. Freddie Mercury stole it from Psalms. How about this one? "Pure as the driven snow." The Bible? Yeah, that's Shakespeare. It's Hamlet. It's from Hamlet. "Love is blind." The Bible. Shakespeare, Merchant of Venice.

You guys are awesome at this game. "Putting words in one's mouth." I heard a little bit of Shakespeare, now everybody's like, "Whatever everybody says, I'm going to say the opposite because they're all so bad at it." The Bible, 2 Samuel 14:3 talks about this. Most of these, by the way, are in the King James Version. That's why you're probably not recognizing them. Well, I mean, some of you knew King James, but for the rest of you ... That was another old joke, guys.

"The blind leading the blind." Who said it? Jesus said it, that's right, in Matthew 15:13, 14. He was talking about the Pharisees, the blind leading the blind, the Pharisees leading the people. "Forever and a day." Shakespeare. You finally got one right. Bonus points. Who said it? What was the character's name who said it in As You Like It? His name was Orlando. "The skin of your teeth." Who's really sure? The Bible or Shakespeare? Job, that's from the book of Job. "Kill them with kindness." Who says, "Kill them with kindness"? Shakespeare, The Taming of the Shrew. There is that passage in the Bible about you can heap burning coals on their head when you're nice, when you're generous. I think I have too many of these. Brokenhearted, the phrase brokenhearted. The Bible, Psalm 34:18 is where that phrase is found. "All the livelong day." Disney, right? Shakespeare, Julius Caesar. It's in Julius Caesar. "Wild goose chase." Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet.

"Can a leopard change his spots?" Nicely done, Jeremiah 13:23. It was not Rudyard Kipling. "A fly in the ointment." You should know this one. Shakespeare, Bible? Yeah, it's in Ecclesiastes 10, last week's lesson. Seriously? "Too much of a good thing." Shakespeare, As You Like It. "Nothing but skin and bones." The Bible, Job again. "At your wit's end." Bible. Yeah, Scott McCurdy's life. The Bible, Psalm 107:27. "Don't stop believing." Journey, nice catch. "Cast your bread on the waters." Where? Yeah, it's the first verse of today's lesson. That was the segue. That was a long segue, wasn't it? That was a long segue. I'm sorry. I got so intrigued by those this week. I have that many more from the Bible and Shakespeare. You're welcome for only doing that half. Those are fascinating, aren't they, the way that both Shakespeare and the Bible have influenced our language more than really, and Shakespeare was when? 1500s, right? Here we are 500 years later and then 2000 to more years later from the Bible and you can see the incredible impact that Shakespeare's works and then, of course, the Bible has had on our language.

DIVERSIFY

Let's jump into this. We're going to jump into Ecclesiastes 11. Let's talk about when you're feeling stuck. The first thing we're going to talk about is Diversify. Turn to Ecclesiastes chapter 11 verse one. It says this, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth." These two verses are very interesting because you can interpret it two ways. If you read the NIV version, what the NIV says is, verse two, it says, "Invest in seven different ventures or even eight." When you hear invest in ventures, what do you think? Business. You think business. The ESV, which is a little bit more of a literal translation, says what? "Give a portion to seven or even eight." Which is it? Is it about generosity or is it a business principle? Yes. It's both, right?

When a writer in the Bible uses language that can have a couple of different meanings, it probably has a couple of different meanings. It's probably that way on purpose. The Bible's sovereignly inspired by the Holy Spirit. When a writer uses language that could be interpreted a couple of different ways, you look at the ways that it could be interpreted and you see which of those makes sense, and this is a great example of a place where both kinds of language make sense. I would lean towards the generosity side, and let me tell you why, because of verse one. It says, "Cast your bread upon the waters." That is one of

those phrases that we hear all the time. What does it mean when we say, "Cast your bread upon the waters"? What does it mean? It means give. It means sort of take opportunity. Don't hold things too tightly because those things will come back to you, but I want you to think about it for a second in the context of when it was said.

Did people have bread to throw away? When they say, think about that, "Cast your bread upon the waters," that's like people might be hearing that and going, "Seriously? I don't have enough bread and you're telling me to throw it in the water?" He's saying, "No, it's going to come back to you." You have a business principle and you have a life principle here. When you're feeling stuck, when you feel like you don't know what to do, the thing to do when you feel ... Have you ever felt stuck? Anybody feel stuck right now with Brett Clemmer? You feel stuck, what I've noticed is when I feel stuck or when I'm talking to guys that feel stuck, it's almost like you feel paralyzed, and different things can motivate you in your stuckness. Maybe you're afraid of making the wrong decision. Maybe you're worried that you're not going to have something that you need. You see a need.

I'll give you a great example. My wife and I were sitting in church a few years back, and there was a need that we saw in the church, and we both felt like we should invest in that need, like we should give to that need. We were both worried that we wouldn't have enough for the things that we needed personally. You know, there was a spirit of fear. There was a fear that we wouldn't be able to. Let's be honest, we're living in the United States of America in 2018 for another couple weeks. I mean, this is a prosperous nation by any standards of history. I mean, I wasn't really worried. I mean, I wasn't casting my bread upon the water. I wasn't thinking about casting bread upon the water and maybe not being able to eat for a day because I did that. That's not what was going. It was like, "Am I going to have to cancel Hulu?" I mean, if I'm honest, that's what it was.

Still, when you're in that moment and you're stuck and you realize that it's fear that's holding you back, that it's distrust because fear ultimately, for a Christian, fear often, maybe not always, but often is sort of rooted in a distrust in God's promises, a distrust that he'll give you everything you need. What the writer here is saying is when you feel stuck, that's when you most need to cast your bread upon the water. Then, he says, "Give a portion to seven or even to eight." Those numbers are very important. Seven in the Bible is often seen as sort of the number of perfection. When you give to seven, it's like that's right. Pick the things out and do your little giving portfolio. Then, that's great. You're good. You say, "Well, I do my budget, and I'm going to give this much. Maybe I'm going to give 10% or I'm going to 12% or I'm going to give whatever the number I feel like I'm supposed to give. Then, I get it all done." Ecclesiastes comes along and says give to eight. Give one more than you planned on. Give one more than what seems perfect. Be more generous than you planned on being. When you're stuck, what you're often stuck in is fear that you're not going to have enough, fear that God's not going to really take care of you. Why is that so important? Certainly, that's a spiritual concept, but you know what? It's a practical concept too. If we keep reading, then we'll see what's next. Diversify. Give, Ecclesiastes says, and then give some more. Give and then give some more.

MOVE

What's next? Move. Look at verse three, "If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth, and if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie. He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap." What's he saying? What he's saying is you can spend all day looking at the clouds thinking, "I don't know. I better not go out and sow my seed today. It might rain. I don't know. I don't know if I want to cut that tree down

today. You know, the wind might be blowing in the wrong way and it might not go the way that I want it to go."

The writer's saying you can sit around and wait for the perfect conditions forever and you will never get anything done. You can sit around and wait for the perfect conditions. You can sit around and say, "I don't want to jump into that opportunity now because it might be better next week. It might be better next month. It might be better next year." What you end up doing is not sowing and not reaping. Think about why does he use these metaphors of sowing and reaping. Well, sowing is like investing in those opportunities, investing in people's lives. Then, reaping is getting the benefit back, harvesting those opportunities. If we sit around and we wait all day long, all week long, all month long, all year long, pretty soon, the decade's past. Maybe it's a business venture that you should have invested in and you didn't. Maybe it's a grandchild who you should have spent more time with and you didn't. Maybe it's a marriage that needed more of your time and attention and intentionality and you just kept, "Well, when this business crisis is over, then I'll invest more in my marriage," and you don't sow into your wife.

"When this project at church is over, then I'll start spending more time with my kids. When this happens," it's sort of this if-then problem. We set these ridiculous ifs. Here's the problem. If you live like that, the if never comes because when the if comes, you just come up with another if. "Well, if this happens or when this happens, then I'll do that. Well, no, no, no. When this happens." The next thing you know, guys, you're sitting around going, "What happened? My kids are gone. My wife and I have no relationship. The people at work that I could know and could have made an impact in their lives, I really haven't. I've been so focused on the wrong things. I've been so much waiting to get to that point," whatever that point is, and you never get there. What you do when you live like this is you just keep putting that point farther and farther and farther out. It's this devotion to the status quo because it's comfortable. Solomon is saying, Ecclesiastes, get moving. Stop watching the clouds. Stop watching the wind.

There's one translation of this passage. It's a paraphrase that says if you'll wait for the perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done. That's what we're talking about here. I mean, I'm talking to me. I do this all the time. I mean, actually, you know what's a great example? Is this event that we just had. I can't tell you the number of times that I've said, "Well, once this event is done, I'll do this. Once this event is done, I'll do that." The event was done, and then, you know what? I got all this follow-up stuff I have to do. I'm getting through the follow-up stuff. Oh, now it's year end in the ministry. Now we're getting the year end stuff. Now, I need to do this thing next fall. I need to start planning for that. I'll be honest with you. I was sitting with my wife at dinner last week, and she looked at me, and she said, "I don't know how much longer we can do this." I said, "What are you talking about?" She said, "What's going on with you at work? I don't know how much longer we can do this."

You know what I went to? Any of you that know my story, you know right where my mind went. My mind went back 18 years, 19 years, really, when my wife looked at me one day when I said I had to go on another business trip and she said, "That's okay. It's easier when you're not here," because I was so consumed with getting my business up and running and I kept thinking in my head, "When I get it up and running, then I'll invest in my marriage. When I get it up and running, then I'll spend more time with my kids." My kids and my wife didn't want a business. They wanted a husband and a dad. This tyranny of trying to get this thing done so that I can get that thing done made it so that I came close to losing it all. That's right back where I went. It was a big moment last week, a big wake up moment for me. I was waiting for the right conditions to do the right thing. Don't wait for the right conditions to do the right thing. Just do the right thing.

You know, I got to tell you, this is when you need men around you because sometimes you can't even see it for yourself. Your friends can see it incredibly clearly, but you can't see it because life is like this sometimes. You just can't see past all the stuff that's going on, but your friends, they have that perspective. They can come in and say, "Whoa. Hang on a second. You're going down this road. You need to go down this road." I've met other guys, they sort of get analysis paralysis. Have you ever heard this phrase before? They're like, "Well, I'm going to look at this thing. I'm just going to keep doing my calculations." These are spreadsheet guys, project management task list things. Everything has a subheading and then a subheading. They're just planning, planning, planning, and they never actually do anything. Ecclesiastes is clear here. If you're feeling stuck, move. Stop waiting for the conditions to be perfect and start moving.

If you continue reading on in the chapter, it says this, "As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything. In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good." This is directly to those analysis paralysis guys. I just want to do the things that are going to make the most impact. Just do something. He's saying you don't know what's going to make the most impact. That thing that you think might make the most impact may not make any impact. That thing that you didn't think was worth anything, that may be the thing that has the greatest impact. If you sit around weighing your options all the time and you never actually move, you're never going to actually accomplish anything. Move, Ecclesiastes says.

LIVE

Take that vacation that you've been putting off for a couple years. Enroll in that class that you've been thinking about forever. Take that new job if you think it's really the right thing to do but you're scared. Move towards a relationship that you're scared to move towards because maybe there's brokenness or hurt or just fear of rejection. Don't just sit and wait for the perfect conditions. You'll never get anything done. Stop worrying about what you can't control, and start moving toward the things that you feel God is leading you to do. Then, the last thing he says in this chapter is live. "Light is sweet," verse seven, "and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity. Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity."

What's he saying here? He's saying stop wringing your hands. Stop worrying about what might have been. Enjoy the great things that happen. Were there dark days? Of course there were dark days. We live in a fallen world, but enjoy the good things. You know, sometimes I think guys who have a lot of experience, can I put it that way, you think people don't want to hear your stories. Well, tell them anyway. The guys that don't have your experiences, they need to hear about your experiences. Revel in them. Give us your advice. Give us your input. Give us your counsel. That's why you've lived as long as you've lived and built up all the experiences that you've experienced. We need to hear them. That's a way that you can praise God for the life that he's given you and the lessons that you've learned. If you keep them all to yourself, he says you're not rejoicing in them. Rejoice in them all.

Young men, have a blast. Go live your life. Don't sit around waiting for the right things to happen. He's saying very clearly go for it. Now, he's giving you a little caveat there though. "But know that for all

these things God will bring you into judgment." He's not saying be reckless. He's not saying be stupid. He's not saying hurt people or do things for your own good, curse the consequences, but he is saying go live a life that you will enjoy. Jesus said, "I came that you might have life and have it abundantly." I think sometimes we sit around feeling guilty for having a good life. Don't feel guilty for having a good life. You make a lot of money, make a lot of money. Give God the glory for it. Give a ton of it away. I'll give you a website if you want to go look at it, but don't be guilty about it.

There is a famous pastor who wrote a book. I won't name the book or the pastor, but he wrote a book and he made a ton of money off the book. He bought a nice house. I remember talking to another prominent pastor about this guy, and he stood out in front of his nice house because he started taking some heat for it. He said, "Oh, you know, we're going to have missionaries stay in it. We're going to use it for ministry work." My pastor friend said, "You know what I wish he had said? I wish he had said, 'You know what? I wrote a book, and a lot of people bought it, and I made a lot of money, and I bought this nice house for my family. I'm going to enjoy it because God gave me every penny of it. I might use it for ministry, and I might have missionaries stay here, but that's not the point. The point is is that this house is a visible representation of God's blessing in my life. I give a ton of money away, and I'm not going to apologize for having a nice house.'" That's this passage. Don't feel guilty for God's blessings on you. Go live your life.

Here's our big idea. With an eye towards eternity, give generously, pursue opportunity, and live joyfully. This is Solomon's 11th secret. Let's pray. Father, thank you so much for a practical book like Ecclesiastes, a book that a business man just said to me, "Where was this when I was in business school? Because everything that I needed to know about business I found when I finally found the book of Ecclesiastes." Lord, it's wonderful how you give us such practical counsel for the way that we live our lives. Father, help us to remember that all good things, all order, all joyfulness, they come from you. The ultimate good thing, the ultimate joyful thing is Jesus dying for our sins and taking away our judgment on himself. Lord, help us to live vibrant lives. Help us to be generous with everything we have. Help us to be opportunistic, Lord, to take advantage of those things that you're putting in front of us so that we can bring you glory and build your kingdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, I just want to give you a little bit of encouragement. You know, Pat likes to say sometimes you need a hug and sometimes you need a kick in the seat of the pants. This is a little bit of a kick in the seat of the pants morning. I want you to know that you are loved. If I didn't care, if your brothers didn't care, they wouldn't kick you in the seat of the pants. They'd probably knock you down and step on you, but we love each other, and so we want to spur each other on to good works. I just want to say, Pat has a saying and I love it. He says we need to have a predisposition to action, that when we see a need, we step into it. When we see an opportunity, we pursue it. When we see the chance to be joyful about something, we're joyful about something. Our predisposition is to action.

I've just got to tell you guys I have never seen a successful person who waited for opportunity to come. Every successful guy I know, their story is of how they pursued something, often pursued something and failed, pursued something and failed, pursued something and failed, pursued something and failed, and then pursued something and succeeded. In the failures, they learned the lessons that they needed to learn in order to be successful when the right opportunity came along. I would just encourage you never consider a failure a waste of your time. It's an investment in what God has for you in the future. With an eye toward eternity, let's give generously, pursue opportunity, and live joyfully. Now, I'm going to ask you to go out a little bit on a limb.

There may be guys in the room right now that there is some kind of an opportunity in front of you, maybe it's an opportunity to be generous, maybe it's a business opportunity, education opportunity, relationship opportunity, and you today realize that you are stuck. If that is you, here's what I'd like you to do. I know it's going to make you uncomfortable. I just want you to stand up wherever you are. Actually, let's do this. Everybody stand up. If there is some decision that you are struggling with, some opportunity that you are feeling like you need to pursue but you just are too scared to do it, I want you to sit back down. Then, the guys around you are just going to gather around, and I'm going to pray.

If there's anything in your life right now that you realize you need to pursue, if you're not living your life joyfully, if there's a relationship that you need to step into, just sit down right where you're at. Don't be bashful. Then, the guys will gather around you and we'll pray. Let's pray. Father, over all these men, I pray that your spirit will come into their lives in a powerful way, that you would prompt them, Lord, with a confidence that comes from a complete trust in you, not in their own strength, but, Lord, a complete trust in your goodness, in your mercy, in your love. Lord, help us to step up, to step into those difficult times, to be generous with what we have, to be opportunistic in the way that we live our lives, and to live joyfully, Lord, all with an eye towards eternity. Bless these men in the weeks ahead, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.