

Living for More: An Investment in Discontentment

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Preacher: Donald Smith

[0 : 0 0] Father, we do thank you again for your word. We pray now that you would speak to each and every one of us through it, that you would open our eyes, that we might see what is good and right and just, and delight to praise and worship you and your Son, Jesus, because of what we hear this evening.

It is in his name that we pray. Amen. Amen. If you're just joining us so far, let me catch you up on what we've seen in Ecclesiastes up to this point.

As with every other wisdom book in the Bible, the teacher in Ecclesiastes wants to show us how to live life well in God's world.

That is his aim, isn't it? How to live life well in God's world. How to get the most of life under the sun. But the teacher in Ecclesiastes is, let's say, quite direct, isn't he?

And so the first few chapters were all about deconstructing the way that we so often live life.

[1 : 2 3] We like to think, don't we, that we really matter and the world will remember us. We like to think we can find satisfaction under the sun. We like to think we are in control of our own destiny, our own time.

The teacher says, no. Because a breath, a breath. Everything is just a breath.

And then we got to chapters 4 and 5, right? Two crucial chapters in this book. Where the teacher finally turns around, right, after uncovering the folly of the way we so often live life, and says, here, here finally is the better way.

Okay. Joe brilliantly took us through those two chapters, didn't he? And the message was, number one, remember, live for we, not me.

Live for others, not yourself. And number two, we saw just at the start of chapter 5, come to the house of God quietly, not loudly.

[2 : 3 6] We're going to summarize what we've seen since the start of chapter 4. It's live for others and let God do the speaking. That is how to live well in this world.

Live for others and let God do the speaking. That's the way to live life well in God's world. But now as we come to the rest of chapter 5 and through chapter 6, he revisits some of the stories so far in this evening's passage.

And what he wants to show us here is that in order for us to live well, right, in order for us to live for others and let God do the speaking, we need to completely ditch the life of chapters 1 to 3.

What we'll see this evening is that living for more, whatever that more might be, is incompatible with living for others and for God.

If we keep on living for more, we are ultimately investing in our own discontentment. So let's just go through this passage together.

[3 : 52] We're actually going to do it a little bit differently this evening. From that passage we read, we're going to start on the outside and work our way into the middle. So the first point the teacher wants to make, if we're looking at the start of chapter 5, start of our reading, and the end of chapter 6, the first point the teacher wants us to make is that living for more is an endless pursuit.

Just look there at verse 10 of chapter 5 with me. You'll have to flick back and cross over the page. Verse 10 of chapter 5, whoever loves money never has enough.

Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. Over to verse 7 of chapter 6, everyone's toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied.

Money and wealth are the main culprits in chapter 5, but throughout this part of Ecclesiastes, the teacher has in view everything we are tempted to live for under the sun.

Often and most obviously, that is money and wealth, because we see that as the means, don't we, to more. But it can be bigger families, it can be successful children, it can be having a husband or a wife, it can be living a long life, it can be getting more likes on your social media posts, better results in your exams.

[5 : 32] If you're living for any of those things, for more of anything, then you'll find yourself again chasing after the wind.

You are setting out on an endless and futile journey. It's like trying to reach the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

The problem isn't whether or not the pot of gold exists. The problem is that the end doesn't exist. It's an appetite that can never be satisfied, a race with no finish line.

Now you may be thinking, we've heard something like this before in Ecclesiastes, and we have, right back in chapter 2, where the teacher tried testing all the pleasures of life to see anything, if anything gave him ultimate satisfaction.

And the teacher brings us back to a very similar message here in chapter 5 and 6, but he adds a new dimension to it. Okay, we've seen now that living life well in God's world means living for others.

[6 : 47] That is the key to the good life, isn't it? But what we now see here in chapter 5 and 6 is that living for more, living for more for me, means crushing others.

The endless pursuit leads only to endless oppression. Come back with me to verse 8 of chapter 5, and look at what the teacher sees. 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 still. Down to verse 11, as goods increase, so do those who consume them. If you want to live life well, you need to live for we, not me.

But if you love money and wealth, you are feeding a system that crushes people. The teacher's point, right, is that the two cannot go hand in hand.

In the simple words of Jesus, you cannot serve God and money. You cannot do it. That is a truth we might know, but what the teacher does here, isn't it, is show us that while we might assent to it with our minds, our actions often betray our true feelings on the matter.

[8 : 27] I was having a look around this week. It's very easy to find out about the dreadful working conditions of factories across the world. that the biggest iPhone factory in India expects their employees to work at a minimum of 60 hours a week.

They get paid one pound an hour. Slightly less, actually. They have brutal production targets, right? They have to turn through 520 iPhones an hour for the whole duration of their shift, right?

That's one every seven seconds for 10 hours straight. The employees feel they are unable to use the restroom during their shifts because of the fear of the repercussions of falling behind the target.

That sounds like a pretty terrible place to work, doesn't it? I don't think any of us would be particularly happy there. Our minds are horrified by the working conditions.

But our hands, our hands hand over the money, don't they? Our hands say to the whole world, actually, we're quite happy with how this system works for me, for us.

[10 : 00] Do you remember the Uyghers in China? There was an international outrage, wasn't there, at the treatment of this ethnic minority in Western China, effectively kidnapped into what they call education camps, where they are basically victims of cultural genocide.

For a few weeks, they were all over the news, weren't they, a couple of years ago? How many of those labor camps do you think shut down? In 2022, EU imports from Xinjiang increased by 34%.

companies who apparently have links in their supply chain there? Nike, Adidas, Anthropologie, Apple, Dell, Microsoft, Google, BMW, Tesla, Coke, Pepsi.

And to the best of my knowledge, none of those companies operate directly there, but they are somewhere in the supply chain. That's the people at the beginning of verse 8.

Oppressed, rights denied, unjustly treated. Why? Verse 11, because when goods increase, there is an undeniable supply of people who will want to get their hands on them.

[11 : 32] All in the foolish assumption that getting a little bit more will make me more satisfied than before. But deep down, we know, don't we, that it doesn't work.

Because a breath, a breath, everything is a breath. living for more is a never-ending pursuit.

You'll never get to the end, but the really uncomfortable slant chapter 5 and 6 brings to light is that as we run, as we go about desperately trying to reach the end of the rainbow, we're not running over meadows, we're running over people.

We stand on top of one another to get more satisfaction, more for ourselves. But the satisfaction never comes, does it?

Maybe for a brief moment, but then it disappears again and on we must go, stepping on more and more. Living for more is an endless pursuit that ends in endless oppression.

[12 : 51] So, come back with me to chapter 4, right? What's the big picture? The teacher wants you to live life well. He wants you to be satisfied. God wants you to be satisfied, to be content.

The way to do that is to live for we, not me. What we learn in chapter 5 is that I cannot live for more and live for others.

They cannot go together. I'm not here to kind of start a social justice campaign, but I think it does, doesn't it, leave us with a choice to make.

Life is so miserable for the people in verse 8 because there are officials, there are people far away who don't care about their condition and want more for themselves.

Well, honestly, where do you think most of us are in that food chain? And please don't hear me saying you shouldn't buy things with your money. It's good to enjoy good things.

[14 : 04] But I do think it's worth asking ourselves, right, what would the world look like if everyone was making the same choice as me right now?

Does it necessitate some people somewhere being mistreated? And if the answer is yes, then you're not living for we, you're living for me. But others aren't the only one, others aren't the only ones that will be harmed.

Because the teacher also shows us that the endless pursuit undertaken at the expense of others actually results in an empty life. Just look at verse 13 of chapter 5 with me.

I've seen a grievous evil under the sun. Look over to chapter 6, verse 1. What does he see? Another, I've seen another evil under the sun. The teacher sees two things which are evil under the sun, doesn't he?

In the first instance, he sees that hoarding hurts the owner. Money disappears in an instant and a father is left with nothing before his son.

[15 : 20] At the beginning of chapter 6, the teacher sees someone who is wealthy, someone who has it all, he seems to have it all, and yet, while his current account looks very healthy, his enjoyment, his happiness is currently running along the line of zeros.

Two pictures of evil that the teacher sees under the sun. Both are pictures of people who appear to have everything but in reality have nothing.

And in both instances, to hammer his point home, the teacher takes his class, doesn't he, on a field trip to his favorite teaching spot.

I don't know what school trips were like for you, I don't have particularly great memories of them. I once had a biology teacher who was fascinated with marshes, so we went to every bog in Aberdeenshire. But if the teacher was going to take us on a school trip, he'd pile us on the bus and drive straight to the cemetery.

He'd huddle the class around a recent gravestone, look us dead in the eye, and say, you know this is going to be you one day very soon, don't you?

[16 : 39] And if you're living for more now, what are you going to have then? Verse 15 of chapter 5, everyone comes naked from their mother's womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart.

They take nothing from their toil that they can carry in their hands. Just as you come, so shall you go.

living for more is an endless pursuit to emptiness, because no matter what you do, no matter how you live your life, no matter how much you love money and wealth, every life is a journey from nothing to nothing.

You come empty-handed, and you'll leave empty-handed. And then in verse 3 of chapter 6, he brings in what seems to be quite shocking illustration, doesn't he?

A man may have a hundred children and live many years, yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say a stillborn child is better off than he.

[18 : 06] Where did that come from? And on first reading, it can seem almost unnecessary, callous, can't it? Especially to anyone who might have suffered the tragedy of miscarriage or stillbirth themselves.

But the teacher is not needlessly opening up wounds. He's making a very clear point that again brings us back to the big picture of Ecclesiastes.

What are we all searching for? Contentment, happiness, satisfaction, rest. That's what we want, isn't it?

That's what we're all looking for, and that is no bad thing. Here's the teacher's point. Who has rest?

He's speaking to God's covenant people here. So tragic as the death of a stillborn child is, where are they now? And the answer is at the end of verse five, though it never saw the sun or new anything, it has more rest.

[19 : 26] It has more rest than does that man. Which man? The man who has more. The man who has lived for two thousand years.

The man who has a hundred children, but never enjoys any of it. man. The man who is living for more, but never takes a moment to enjoy what he has.

That is the man who has no rest. man. I hope you're hearing what the teacher is saying, but I recognize this is maybe thin ice, so let me just clarify what the teacher is not saying, in case I've not been clear.

The teacher is not saying that death is better than life. Okay, in a couple of chapters time, the teacher will say explicitly, albeit in a very teacher-esque way, that life is better.

A living dog is better than a dead lion. life is better. The teacher views life positively. Life is a good thing. Neither is the teacher saying that we should see the lives of young children cut short in any way positively.

[20 : 45] The teacher laments the brokenness of this world. He laments the short years of life. Death is no good thing whenever it comes and whoever it comes to. What the teacher is saying is that if if, right, if you spend your life living for more and never enjoy what you have, you're completely wasting it.

If you were to live for 2,000 years, if you were to have 100 children, but you always wanted more and never stopped to enjoy what you have, if that's the life you live, if that's the life you live, then a stillborn child is better off than you.

Why? Because only one of you has what we are all so desperately longing for. Rest. life is better.

Life is better, but only if you live to enjoy what you have been given instead of constantly striving for more. I'll say that again.

Life is better, but only if you live to enjoy what you have instead of constantly striving for more.

[22 : 17] rest. We want rest. So where should we go? Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Those are the wonderful words of Jesus. What does Jesus want to give you? More money? No. The best exam results in your class? The next promotion at work?

More followers on Twitter? None of those things. Jesus wants to give you rest, and he is the one that can give it to you.

Let's just look finally at verse 18 to 20 of chapter 5. Between the two evil sights the teacher sees under the sun, he now sees something good, doesn't he?

This is what I have observed to be good. Here's what is good. To eat and drink and find satisfaction in your toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them.

[23 : 34] For this is their lot. We've heard that a few times now before in Ecclesiastes, haven't we? And here comes the new angle for this refrain for good godly living that chapter 5 and 6 gives us.

Verse 19, Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions and the ability to enjoy them and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil, this is the gift of God.

Let's just slow that down, verse 19 there, and look at all that is the gift of God. The first gift of God we see there in verse 19 is wealth and possessions, isn't it?

Wealth is a blessing from God. Love of it is a very bad investment. money is but money itself is not the problem.

In fact, the Bible is generally very positive about wealth. We just saw this morning, didn't we? King Jesus presented with three incredibly valuable gifts. We're not supposed to read that and think, wealth is a good thing so long as we don't live for it, so long as we don't love it.

[25 : 13] So if you are sitting here this evening as a relatively wealthy person, don't feel guilty about that. and indeed if you are not wealthy, don't feel self-righteous about being poor.

The question is all about our attitude to having more. The ones who are best off here this evening are those who do not love to have more.

Whether you have little or much right now doesn't really matter. But what you do have is a gift of God.

A gift of God. It's not a reward for faithful service. Right? More faithful Christians aren't always the poorest in the room, nor are they always the wealthiest. But whatever we have is what God has given to us.

That's not all God gives in verse 19, is it? God has given us what we have, and most importantly, God is the one who gives the ability to enjoy it.

[26 : 21] that's the problem at the beginning of chapter six, isn't it? There is someone with plenty of wealth, but no ability to enjoy any of it.

Where does the ability to enjoy it come from? Well, that too is a gift of God. Godly living is contented living.

if you are striving for more, you're expressing a dissatisfaction with what God has given you in the present.

But wise living, good godly living, is learning to accept your lot and find enjoyment in what you have, whatever that might be. Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it.

But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. now we might hear being content with food and clothing and think, oh, that sounds a bit dreary, isn't it?

[27 : 49] But that's exactly the attitude the teacher is trying desperately to undo. Because someone with food and clothing and the God-given ability to enjoy those things will be far happier, far more satisfied, far more content than the man with a Ferrari who never has a smile on his face.

Paul says elsewhere in the Philippian, I have learned to be content in plenty and in want. It's not about how much we have. The godly life is being content with your lot, however much that might be.

So stop striving for more and start enjoying what you have been given. If you can't enjoy what you have at the moment, don't live for more, don't pray for more, but pray for the ability to enjoy what you have.

That is the gift of God that all his people should ask for off the back of this passage. Don't ask for more, don't live for more, ask for the ability to enjoy what you have.

If you can't find contentment in what you have now, you'll never find contentment no matter how much you end up with. If you never enjoy rest, rest, a stillborn child is better off than you.

[29 : 35] But life is better, and the life Jesus wants you to have, the life Jesus will give you if you come to him and ask, is one of rest, of enjoying the good gifts of God, accepting your lot, and enjoying what you have been given.

Instead of trying to get to the end of the rainbow, we're just supposed to sit down and enjoy the rainbow. If you want to live well, if you want to fear God, if you want to love others, stop living for more, but that absolutely does not mean you won't enjoy life.

Pray, pray that God would enable you to enjoy what he has given, and you will find very quickly yourself more at rest than you've ever been before. Let us pray for that just now.

Father, we thank you that you are the giver of all good gifts. We thank you that you have given us wealth and possessions. We pray, Lord, that you would give us the ability to enjoy them.

to accept our lot in life, to be content with food and clothing, to find satisfaction and rest in that and that alone. Father, forgive us for the times when we live for more.

[31 : 10] Forgive us for the times when we have loved money, when we have willingly oppressed others, that we might increase our own goods. others. But, Father, help us to live for we, not me.

Help us to love others as we would love ourselves. And help each and every one of us here to enjoy life by finding rest and contentment in all that you have given us.

We thank you most of all for the greatest gift of all, your precious son, Jesus, in whose name we know, pray. Amen.