



LET GOD BE GOD

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 5:1-20

As we jump into chapter 5, we find the Searcher answering the objections he raised in chapter 4. He covers a lot of ground in this chapter, reminding the reader to 1) Learn to let God be God, 2) Listen carefully, 3) Don't play games with God, 4) Value government; it too is from God, and 5) Money will not satisfy you.

Notice how the chapter closes:

For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart. (Ecclesiastes 5:20 RSV)

Have you ever met people like that? They have lived a full life, but they never talk about the past. Some people live in the past.

William Randolph Hearst, who amassed one of the great fortunes of our time, ended his days amidst all the opulence and splendor of the castle which he built in Southern California, sitting in a basement, playing over and over again the movies of his paramour from Hollywood, in an effort to eke out a degree of enjoyment from the past.

When people discover the richness of life which God has provided, they do not think of the past or even talk about it. They do not talk about the future either because they are so richly involved with the savor of life right now.

It is good to know the Living God, who controls what comes into your life. He expects you to make choices; Scripture always encourages that. But rejoice in the wisdom of a Father's heart, and richly enjoy what is handed you day-by-day; that is the secret of life. Such a one "will not much remember the days of his life" because God will keep him occupied "with joy in his heart."¹

Open It

1. **When was a time that you spoke too soon or too much, and what was the outcome of the situation?**

¹<https://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/ecclesiastes/why-does-god-allow-this>

Apply It

Learn to let God be God; that is the first thing the author declares to us. The lessons of life will fall into place when you learn that. God is in charge of life; let him be in charge; take these lessons from his hands.

The place to learn is in the house of God. When you go there, guard your steps, i.e., enter thoughtfully, and expect to be taught something. In ancient Israel, of course, the house of God was the Temple in Jerusalem. Their sacrifices were offered, and an explanation was made to the people as to what they meant. There the law was read, and the wisdom of God about life was given to people; this marvelous Old Testament was unfolded, with its tremendous insights into the truth about life, about what humanity basically and fundamentally is. The Temple was the only place in the land where people could learn these things. In our day, the house of God is no longer a building. We must be clear about that. You, the people, are the house of God. What the Searcher is saying is that when you gather together as the people of God, be expectant; there is something to be learned.²

9. How are you preparing yourself and your household to be ready to hear and learn from God each week?

As you prepare your heart, mind, and soul to be taught the Word, there are some steps you should think about taking each week, starting on Monday morning. Below is a list of five words or phrases...prepare your game plan below on how you can implement these things into your life to prepare you better for Sunday morning.

10. Commit, Worship, Pray, Read, and Early arrival

² Ibid

There are about 30 biblical references to vows, most of which are from the Old Testament. The books of Leviticus and Numbers have several references to vows concerning offerings and sacrifices. There were dire consequences for the Israelites who broke vows, especially vows to God.

The story of Jephthah illustrates the foolishness of making vows without understanding the consequences. Before leading the Israelites into battle against the Ammonites, Jephthah—described as a mighty man of valor—made a rash vow that he would give to the Lord whoever first came out of doors to meet him if he returned home as the victor. When the Lord granted him victory, the one who came out to meet him was his daughter. Jephthah remembered his vow and offered her to the Lord (Judges 11:29–40).

Jesus taught concerning vows, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Matthew 5:33–37).

So, Jesus was not condemning all forms of promises, contracts, or agreements. Jesus was speaking of the kind of spontaneous vow made when a person says, “I cross my heart and hope to die,” or “I swear on a stack of Bibles,” or “I swear on my mother’s life.” Jesus warns against using those types of flippant oaths. His teaching in Matthew 5 is not meant to discourage careful, thought-out promises, such as wedding vows or a legal contract.

The principle here is clear for Christians: be careful about making vows to the Lord or one another. The fact that we are prone to errors in judgment means that we may make vows foolishly or out of immaturity. Further, the informal vows we make (“I swear by all the angels in heaven!”) are completely unnecessary. Our word is our bond.³

11. What is a time when you made a vow to man or to God? Did you keep the promise?

³ <https://www.gotquestions.org/vows-God.html>

Ecclesiastes 5:8-9 says, "If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.."⁴ The argument is simple: do not be astonished and bitter. God has set up higher officials who may correct oppression when they become aware of it. But even if they do not, there is One yet higher. He is aware, and he knows what he is doing. Recognize that there is good in government. Someone said, "Even bad government is better than no government at all." We cannot live in anarchy. Even the worst kind of government is better than no government at all. Value that. It will help in dealing with the problems of life.⁵

12. Why does politics play such a huge role in the lives of so many people?

The Work We Do is Broken (4:4-12)

Most people feel that if they could only get rich, they could handle life's pressures and problems. The fact is, money will not satisfy you; money will not leave you feeling full and enjoying life. There is plenty of testimony to that today.⁶

Proverbs 15:27 says, "Whoever is greedy for unjust gain troubles his own household, but he who hates bribes will live."⁷

13. Besides your home, what is the most extravagant (expensive maybe) thing that you have purchased? How did it make you feel when you bought it?

⁴ The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

⁵ <https://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/ecclesiastes/why-does-god-allow-this>

⁶ Ibid

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One time my good friend came to my house and showed me a picture of his Georgia house. It was surprising to see how large and beautiful it was. Because I had recruited him to join me in Indiana at the school I was leading and now had left the school, along with him and his family, I apologized for “taking” him away from his gorgeous house. He looked at me seriously and said, “Chappy, it is all going to burn!” He wasn’t saying this tongue-in-cheek but was looking through the lens of scripture.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”⁸

2 Peter 3:10 says, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”⁹

14. Referring to question 13, what is the current state of that most extravagant “thing” you purchased? If it’s still around, how much life does it have?

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

As chapter five is coming to an end, the author reminds us that there are disadvantages to having riches. First, money will not satisfy you; money will not leave you feeling full and enjoying life. There is plenty of testimony to that today.¹⁰ Secondly, “When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?”¹¹ That is, you will soon discover that a crowd of parasites gather around you to spend your money for you; you get nothing out of them but expense.

He develops this even further: “Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.”¹² A second disadvantage to having money is that you worry about how to take care of your property. You stay awake nights, worrying about how to keep what you have.

There is a third disadvantage: “There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand.”¹³ You can lose your riches too. They can disappear overnight. Your fortune is gone with a turn of the wheel, a drop in the Dow Jones Averages.

Finally, riches will not survive death, but you will: “As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.”¹⁴ You can take absolutely nothing away with you. Life is empty and meaningless for so many people. They suffer from “Destination Sickness”; having arrived at where they always wanted to be and having everything they always wanted to have, they do not want anything they've got.¹⁵

15. Spend 10 minutes with God praying through A.C.T.S. (Affirm God in who He is, Confess your sins to the Father, share your Thankfulness with the King, and ask the Almighty to Supply your needs and let Him know the desires of your heart). These 10 minutes are worth more than gold.

¹⁰ <https://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/ecclesiastes/why-does-god-allow-this>

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¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ <https://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/ecclesiastes/why-does-god-allow-this>

This study was compiled and questions were written by Phil Chapman (Sugar Grove Campus)—www.villagebible.church/smallgroup