

Life Above the Sun Devotional: Week 5

By MariLee Parrish

Week 5: Monday

Read Ecclesiastes 5: 1-3

“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.”

Devotional. We Christians can get pretty touchy when it comes to talking about our money. Some seem to say “God, I want your will in my life, but please leave my money out of it.” The truth is that our heartstrings are often tied up with our purse-strings! Zig Ziglar says “Money won't make you happy, but everybody wants to find out for themselves.” You can generally look at a person's bank account and find out what matters most to him or her. And the Bible confirms this in Matthew 6: 21: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

As we prepare to spend a lot of time in Ecclesiastes 5 this week, it's important to take a look at our hearts first. The “Big Idea” in Ecclesiastes 5 is this: “Seeing wealth as a gift will keep us from being possessed by our possessions” (Tony Tice). So, as our scripture today reminds us, “draw near to listen” with a humble heart. No matter your age or how much wisdom you've acquired in financial matters, God is God and we are not. He still has lessons to teach and wisdom to dole out to each one of us.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, You've told us in Luke 12:15 that our lives don't consist of the abundance of our possessions and You warn us to be on guard against any kind of greed. I ask that You search my heart this week, highlight anything in me that needs to change and lead me to Your truth.

Week 5: Tuesday

Read Ecclesiastes 5: 4-7

“When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.”

Devotional. Actions speak louder than words. What you do with what you have tells the whole truth no matter how many times you've said a certain thing or shared your beliefs about a subject. Today's scripture reminds us to keep our promises, to pay what we promise to pay, to do what we say we're going to do, and to be humble before God.

These verses also remind us that *we* aren't the point, we are to "stand in awe of God." We exist for God, not the other way around. Ask yourself these questions: How are you doing at recognizing God as the owner of everything you have and yourself as the steward? Do your finances reflect that truth?

Our attitude towards God about our money and possessions declares the condition of our hearts. The story goes that John Wesley's home was lost in a fire. When the man delivered the terrible news that his house burned to the ground, Wesley calmly responded that it wasn't his home that burnt to the ground, but God's. And he said that meant one less responsibility for him.

Faced with similar circumstances, we would rightfully view a house fire as the tragedy it is. The point is that we have hope during any circumstance because we know that God is in control of our things and we trust Him to provide for us as His beloved stewards.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, Please keep changing my heart and attitude about my possessions. I want to steward everything You've given me in a way that brings glory and honor to You.

Week 5: Wednesday

Read Ecclesiastes 5: 8-15

"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. He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? 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.

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. 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."

Devotional. Pastor and Author Randy Alcorn, in his book "The Treasure Principle," paraphrases these verses like this:

"The more you have, the more you want.

The more you have, the less you're satisfied.

The more you have, the more people (including the government) will come after it.

The more you have, the more you realize it does you no good.

The more you have, the more you have to worry about.

The more you have, the more you can hurt yourself by holding on to it.

The more you have, the more you have to lose.

The more you have, the more you'll leave behind."

We all know in our hearts that money can't buy happiness and none of us get to take any of our things with us when we die. So why do we give money and possessions so much power over us? Take these thoughts to Jesus in prayer.

Pray. Lord Jesus, continue Your good work in my heart. Help me unravel all the things I've wrapped around my life that don't match Your will for me. I give You my heart and I give You control of my money and possessions.

Week 5: Thursday

Read Ecclesiastes 5: 16-17

"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."

Devotional. Billy Graham said: "If a person gets his attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area in his life." And the opposite is also true: if your attitude about money is wrong, it affects every other area of your life, too.

Check out these quotes by some of the wealthiest people of their time:

- W.H. Vanderbilt said "The care of \$200 million is enough to kill anyone. There is no pleasure in it."
- John D. Rockefeller said: "I have made many millions, but they have brought me no happiness."

In contrast, Martin Luther said "I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all. But whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess."

Consider this verse: "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chronicles 29:14). David was praising God as his people gave abundantly to build the temple. May our hearts be stirred to worship as they did:

"Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name." 1 Chronicles 29:10b-13

Prayer. Lord Jesus, I'm ready to relinquish control of my money and my attitude towards money. Help me to see everything as a gift from Your hand. Help me to keep my heart and my hands open as You lead me.

Week 5: Friday

Read Ecclesiastes 5: 18-20

“Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.”

Devotional. Pastor Tony calls these verses the “prescription for not being possessed by your possessions.” Everything we have is a gift from God and as we ask Him to bring contentment and thankfulness into our hearts and minds through the power of the Holy Spirit, He fills us with a living hope that can never perish, spoil, or fade!

As we close this fifth chapter of Ecclesiastes, we look up with hope and find the truth that Jesus is our greatest treasure:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1: 3-7).

Prayer. Lord Jesus, You alone are my greatest treasure! I commit my whole heart, attitude, and actions to You. Let Your Holy Spirit rise up in me in new ways to lead me into Your truth and give me the power and ability to live my life as an act of true worship to You.