

Life Above the Sun Devotional: Week 6

By Laurie Ness

Week 6: Monday

Read Ecclesiastes 6:1-2: *¹There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: ²a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.*

Devotional. Have you heard of Hetty Green, who was called “The Witch of Wall Street” in the late 1800s/early 1900s? She was a multi-millionaire (billionaire by today’s standards) who lived like a pauper. It is said she wore the same black unwashed dress until it completely wore out, wouldn’t use heat or hot water, and lived with a painful hernia rather than having surgery. All this and more she endured because she didn’t want to spend money. We can’t help but wonder *why*. Why would someone completely forgo the enjoyment of their wealth?

Solomon talks here about a man who is given much by God, but then He doesn’t allow the guy to enjoy any of it. Again, why would this be?

The answer is unknown, but the difference between the two scenarios tells us much. Hetty Green chose to live that way, while God was the one to withdraw the enjoyment from the man in these Ecclesiastes verses. A stranger benefited from it all instead. It makes no sense from our point of view, but we need to remember that our view is very limited. God sees the whole picture.

I’m reminded of two important truths in this passage. First, God is sovereign, and we don’t have to understand everything He does in order to trust Him. Second, if we have the ability to enjoy what He has blessed us with, we ought to while we can. To enjoy His blessings is not greed, as long as we’re grateful, satisfied with what we have, and willing to share His blessings with others.

Prayer. Thank You, God, for your gifts to us. Please help us to be in tune with You as we decide how to enjoy and share the things you’ve blessed us with. May we trust Your goodness if ever You deem it best that we aren’t able to enjoy what we have.

Week 6: Tuesday

Read Ecclesiastes 6:3-6: *³If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life’s good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. ⁴For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its*

name is covered. ⁵ *Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he.* ⁶ *Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?*

Devotional. These verses strike me as harsh. Imagine saying someone's life is so wretched that they'd be better off had they been stillborn! Actually, we don't have to imagine—Solomon said this very thing.

But Solomon isn't God. And he is talking about life under the *sun*, not the *Son*. If we are living with our eyes on the Lord, there is joy to be had, regardless of our circumstances.

Solomon uses a father of a hundred children in his example. It's difficult to imagine raising a hundred children, but in reality, even the largest families we know of don't have nearly that many kids. Children are a blessing and a gift, though, and a huge reason to choose joy.

I can see why a parent of many kids might feel grumpy sometimes. Imagine all the lost shoes, snotty noses to wipe, and just the logistics of keeping track of everyone. But, just because we feel something doesn't mean we have to live by that feeling. We always have the option of choosing joy.

Unlike yesterday's passage, today's verses don't indicate that God was the one prohibiting the man from enjoying his children and other blessings; so it seems the man's lack of joy truly was his own choice. Let's not be like him. May we embrace attitudes today that will bring satisfaction when we look back on our lives later.

Prayer. Lord, please continue to teach us about the attitude of joy. Please help us to choose it no matter what our feelings are at any given time. Remind us that joy surpasses our feelings.

Week 6: Wednesday

Read Ecclesiastes 6:7: ⁷ *All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.*

Devotional. Our bodies aren't the only things that need to be fed. Our souls need nourishment, too.

"Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." John 6:35

Jesus gives us the answer here as to why the man in Ecclesiastes is not satisfied. He is working hard to be able to feed his stomach, but spending no time nourishing his soul. We don't want to be like this foolish man!

Since our souls have appetites, too, it's important to satisfy them with the right things. If we avoid things like prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, and fellowship with other believers, our "God-shaped void" will attempt to fill itself with wrong, harmful things.

My natural tendency is to try to be independent. Some independence is healthy, but to go overboard is detrimental to our well-being. I have gradually learned over the years the benefits of allowing people to be aware of my shortcomings and sometimes my need for help. And I'm present to encourage others as well.

God designed us to need others to encourage us to care for our souls. Can a person maintain his/her relationship with Jesus without the spurring on of other believers? Maybe. Is he/she likely to? Probably not.

On the other hand, no one can do it *for* us. We each as individuals need to make the choice to prioritize our quiet times with the Lord, our times of deeper Bible study, and fellowship with fellow Christ-followers.

I encourage you to purposefully have people in your life who will kindly inspire you to keep up with spiritual disciplines, so your soul will be fed and satisfied!

Prayer. Father, I want to be close to You, and I want to find my soul's satisfaction in You. Help me to submit to Your leading in my life. Thank You for loved ones who encourage me to keep my focus on You.

Week 6: Thursday

Read Ecclesiastes 6:8-9: *⁸For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living? ⁹Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.*

Devotional: We know by now that much of what Solomon is saying in the Book of Ecclesiastes is from the point of view of a person living under the *sun*, not the *Son*. So, when he says that material things we can see are better than the things our souls long for, we can assume this pessimistic viewpoint is meant to make a point.

Our human nature wants to collect more and more things, but our acquisitions bring absolutely no lasting satisfaction. Once we get everything we thought we wanted, we will only want more. *Things* don't satisfy the eternal part of us—our souls. Only God can do that.

Contentment is what we ought to choose, but it can be elusive. Materially, we can choose to be content with what God has blessed us with. We can pray to Him with thanksgiving, acknowledging Him as the giver of good gifts. But the deepest contentment comes from a relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

John 10:10-11 tells us, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Jesus offers life! He tenderly cares for us like a shepherd for his sheep. He gave up everything He had the right to keep, for the sake of people (you and me and every other human) who treated Him like dirt. He offers us true abundance in our lives here on earth, if we choose to follow Him. There is such joy even in the painful process of giving up our wants and ways in exchange for His.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, thank You for paying the debt I owed but could never pay. Thank You that my soul can be satisfied—not with things, but through my relationship with You. Please help me to do my part to nurture this precious relationship.

Week 6: Friday

Read Ecclesiastes 6:10-12: ¹⁰ *Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he.* ¹¹ *The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man?* ¹² *For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?*

Devotional. Why even bother? Why bother to speak? Why bother to pray? Why bother to hope? If everything is already determined by an unchangeably powerful Being; and if words are just foolishness; and if life is just vain . . . what's the use?

Solomon is just a ray of sunshine, isn't he?

Oh, friend, don't lose hope! Solomon is doing that thing again where he uses pessimism to make a point of how desperate life is when our eyes are only on what's going on in this world. Ecclesiastes is a perfect example of why it's so important to read all of Scripture, and allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Can you imagine what a person would be missing if all they read was Ecclesiastes?

If we are students of the Bible as a whole, we know that there are definite reasons to speak and pray and hope. God tells us so—many times!

So, speak! (Eph. 4:15) Speak words of truth over your own life, your loved ones, and people who cross your path.

Pray! (Eph. 6:18) There is truly power in prayer. Pray in your private times with the Lord. Pray with your family. Pray with prayer groups. Pray for someone on the spot when they let you know their need. God is always listening.

Hope! (1 Peter 1:13) Just as He is always listening, God is also always working. We often can't see the results of that work—especially in our own timing—but it's happening. He has a perfect plan that He is working out in His perfect timing.

Prayer. Thank You, God, that life is so much more than what we see here on earth. We are grateful that, if we have chosen to trust Your Son, we have hope beyond measure.