

6

FULL CONTENTMENT



What rules seemed unnecessary to you as a kid?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

Obedience is the key to a full life.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

When our girls were just toddlers, we found a fun way to teach them about obedience. They would hide in the house, listen for our voices, and follow our commands. “One day,” we explained, “first time obedience will save your life.” OK, so it sounds melodramatic. I know.

But a while later, we took a family trip to the local fairgrounds. Not much was going on. In fact, the parking lot was practically empty. As we were enjoying the beautiful day outside, my wife noticed our four-year-old wandering toward the parking lot. As she headed to our van, unaware of her surroundings, a car came racing through the parking lot. When I looked up, I realized they were on a collision course—and I had no doubt she wouldn’t win. Instantly, I yelled, “STOP!”

And she did. *Immediately.* Obedience really did save her life that day. That kind of obedience is not just for children. We all benefit from a life of obedience. While Jesus’ obedience has saved our lives for eternity, Solomon reminds us that our own obedience is the key to a full life.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Ecclesiastes 11:7-10

⁷ Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Remove vexation from your heart, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

The life of obedience is not a dull or limited life. God's demands on our lives are neither burdensome nor oppressive. Too many people fall for the satanic lie that God is a killjoy. Nothing could be further from the truth. God wants His people to enjoy life!

- 1. Savor life (v. 7).** Light represents life, while darkness represents death (v. 8). We only have one life to live, and it is "sweet." Solomon said it is also "pleasant." "It is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun" refers to living this good life with joy. God wants us to live this life filled with joy.
- 2. Rejoice in a long life (v. 8).** Life on earth is short in the big picture of eternity, but no matter how many years we live, we are to rejoice in every day God gives us. Why? Because "the days of darkness . . . will be many." In other words, the days we are dead—the "days of darkness"—will be far more numerous than the days we are alive. Solomon was not saying this life is all there is. He was merely making a statement about the brevity of life.

Solomon's words carry a warning to reject passivity. Don't just let life happen to you; redeem the time. God may give you a few years, or He may give you an unusually long life. Either way, live it well!

How can we maximize periods of joy in our lives while they are occurring?

QUESTION #2

3. Rejoice in your youth (v. 9). A statement we often hear is: “Youth is wasted on the young.” Solomon warned us not to waste our youth. Instead, we should take advantage of it, rejoice in it, and enjoy it! We can rejoice if . . .

▶ **. . . we let joy spring from the inner person (“the heart”).** Solomon wrote that “the springs of life flow from the heart”(Prov. 4:23). Joy does not come from our circumstances; it begins in the inner person, in the heart. Joy finds its source in God and in God alone.

▶ **. . . we let joy overflow into the outer life (“our walk”).** Solomon was not telling us to “follow our hearts” as the world likes to say. He was saying what Jesus would later say: our hearts dictate our outward way of life. (See Matt. 15:19.) If evil dwells in our hearts, evil spills out in our lives. However, if we have new hearts that experience joy in Christ, then that joy will flow out and be evident to others.

4. Fear the Lord (v. 9). Lest we think the command to enjoy life means to “go crazy,” we’re reminded that God’s judgment awaits us. Fear of the Lord is not only a healthy respect and awe of God, it’s also realizing that we all will stand before the living God and give an account.

5. Remove any obstacles to joy (v. 10). God wants you to enjoy life, and that means removing any obstacles that might inhibit joy.

▶ **Remove the inner obstacles to joy.** The sorrows that weigh us down could include anxiety, sinful anger, bitterness, cynicism, or a critical spirit.

▶ **Remove the outer obstacles to joy.** Physical pain and weaknesses may be something out of our control, but we should do what we can. A good diet, regular exercise, and rest have great value to our lives. And beyond that, we can refuse to allow any ailments or problems to hinder our joy.

What can we learn from periods of darkness in our lives that can help us in the present?

QUESTION #3

THE OBEDIENT LIFE

Choose one of the following pictures that best represents obedience to you.
Then offer a prayer of obedience to God.



Prayer:

"I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need."

— PHILIPPIANS 4:12

Ecclesiastes 12:12-14

¹² My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. ¹³ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Throughout Ecclesiastes, there has been one driving question: “What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?” (1:3). This is a question of meaning and purpose. Throughout Ecclesiastes, Solomon examined several areas in the search for meaning, but he found the answer and now came to his conclusion.

Of course that won’t keep others from continuing to search for meaning in life. Solomon warned his son of “making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.” This is no less true today. Authors who are ready to explain life to us and give us tips and “life hacks” for meaning and happiness flood bookstores.

Solomon was not dismissing the value of books, but one book stands apart from the others as the true source of wisdom: God’s Word. Even Solomon in all his wisdom knew his “words of delight” and “words of truth” (12:10) were not his alone. He acknowledged his sayings were “given by one Shepherd” (v. 11).

God’s inspired Word is sufficient to lead us to the life of obedience He requires of us and the life of joy He desires for us. Solomon’s quest led him to just two conclusions; in these two actions, we find all we need to experience the meaning and purpose God designed for our lives.



- ▶ **Fear God.** Human wisdom only seeks to explain life “under the sun”; that is, without God. But the wisdom we need is that which comes from above, the divine wisdom that gives us insight into God’s character, will, and ways. And when we look to Him, He provides the wisdom we need. As Solomon said in the Book of Proverbs: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (9:10). Living by God’s wisdom results in righteous living.

What does this fear of God look like? It is rooted in a knowledge of who God is: His character, His purposes, and His ways. When we understand who God is and what He is doing in the world, we will respond appropriately to Him in honor, submission, love, and obedience.

- ▶ **Keep His commands.** When we fear the Lord we will do what He has commanded because we know “God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

We now know something Solomon only hoped to know during his life. While God gave the task of “judgment to the Son” (John 5:22), Jesus took that judgment upon Himself and died in our place. (See 2 Cor. 5:21.) It is in the cross of Jesus that we see God’s wrath and mercy meet; in the cross both God’s love and justice were displayed.

This good news does not free us to enjoy a life of sin. The gospel frees us to live the joy-filled life of holiness in obedience to all that Jesus has commanded us. (See Matt. 28:19-20.) Reverent obedience to God is the way to enjoy the life He has given us.

This brief life is a gift from God, but in Christ, we can enjoy this life to the fullest. We can take advantage of each day we have and live it in full obedience to the glory of God. In Christ, the meaningless of life is gone—forever.

When have you seen reverent obedience to God lead to contentment?

QUESTION #4

What are some ways our group can help one another follow the principles in this study?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). What are some ways you can cultivate obedience to God this week? Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Pray.** Express your fear of the Lord through prayer. Worship Him, surrender to Him, and acknowledge His lordship.
- ▶ **Obey.** If joy is absent or if life often feels meaningless, consider areas where you’re lacking in obedience to God. Identify those areas of disobedience, repent, and resolve to trust Christ through your obedience.
- ▶ **Meet.** Invite others to meet with you over coffee to talk about the meaning of life. Use this study as a springboard for your conversation. Consider walking with them through this same study to help them discover a life of meaning in Christ.



Obedience to the Lord is certainly life-saving. It’s also life-changing in ways that affect us and overflow to others. Obedience is the key to a full life.

My thoughts