



SESSION 6

FULL CONTENTMENT

▶ **The Point**

Obedience is the key to a full life.

▶ **The Passage**

Ecclesiastes 11:7-10; 12:12-14

▶ **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.

▶ **The Setting**

On the surface, Ecclesiastes seems like a dark, almost depressing work. Throughout the book, Solomon described frustration after frustration. He searched for meaning in so many places, but nothing satisfied his longing. But ancient wisdom literature often pointed to the right decision by emphasizing the dangers of wrong decisions. And Ecclesiastes points people to God by demonstrating the futility of life without Him. In the end, Solomon explained, true contentment can be found only in obedience to our Creator.

What does the Bible say?

The days of darkness

(11:8)—Symbolic term for death. We should make the most of our brief lives because death—and eternity—is a reality.

Ecclesiastes 11:7-10; 12:12-14

^{11:7} 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.

^{12:12} 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.

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes



Notes

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 53 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “**What rules seemed unnecessary to you as a kid?**” Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “**The Bible Meets Life**” on page 54 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of obedience by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, prepare a large sheet of paper with the following sentences to complete: The key to safe driving is . . . The key to playing soccer is . . . The key to baking a cake is . . . The key to playing golf is . . . The key to a budget is . . . The key to clean laundry is . . . The key to good lemonade is . . . Add other sentences as needed. Read aloud one sentence at a time and allow class members to finish the sentence with their idea of the “key.” After responding to, and discussing, each of these, **ask:** “What is the key to a full life?”

GUIDE: Call attention to “**The Point**” on page 54 of the PSG: “**Obedience is the key to a full life.**”

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking the Lord to help us understand the importance of obedience. Thank Him for setting the example for us and empowering us to follow it through His Holy Spirit.

Dotted lines for taking notes.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Ecclesiastes 11:7-8

⁷Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. ⁸So 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.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ecclesiastes 11:7-8 on page 55 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for these verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to describe the contrast Solomon makes between light and darkness.

DISCUSS: **Question #2** on page 55 of the PSG: **“How can we maximize periods of joy in our lives while they are occurring?”**

SUMMARIZE: 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! Highlight the main points from pages 55-56 of the PSG.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

In what ways should future accountability guide wise decisions in the present?

1. **Savor life (v. 7).** God wants us to live this life filled with joy.
2. **Rejoice in a long life (v. 8).** Solomon was not saying this life is all there is. He was merely making a statement about the brevity of life.
3. **Rejoice in your youth (v. 9).** Solomon warned us not to waste our youth. Instead, we should take advantage of it, rejoice in it, and enjoy it!
4. **Fear the Lord (v. 9).** 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.

TRANSITION: Enjoy the life God has given, but He will hold you accountable for how you enjoy it.

Ecclesiastes 11:7-8 Commentary

[Verse 7] Nothing makes you appreciate light quite as much as having to spend time in darkness. Through the pages of Ecclesiastes, Solomon had walked in a lot of darkness. He wanted to find contentment and satisfaction. He longed to discover purpose and meaning and life. But every attempt came up empty. He tried physical pleasures, intellectual pursuits, and financial success, but nothing produced light. Nothing dispelled the darkness. Except God.

In the background of all the futility, Solomon kept seeing the fingerprints of God. All the negatives pointed to one eternal positive. Life on its own might seem meaningless, but it doesn't have to be that way because God flips the script by bringing light to the darkness. The Bible often uses the images of light and darkness to contrast two different attitudes toward life. Darkness relates to fear and sorrow, while light highlights joy and satisfaction. Solomon's phrase **light is sweet** emphasizes the blessings we experience on earth. Life is a gift from God, so it should be enjoyed. Embrace the opportunities each day provides because those opportunities are limited. Each day our eyes get **to see the sun** is a new adventure to be explored. These verses set the tone for Solomon's final discourse of Ecclesiastes. While his other lessons had emphasized the futility of trying to make life better with the stuff of earth, this passage shifts the tone. Rather than pursuing the world's definition of meaning, it makes more sense to find true contentment in pleasing the One who made us and loves us more than we can imagine. Where hedonism falls woefully short, obedience provides purpose!

[Verse 8] Solomon reminded readers of another truth: Life is short. We are mortal. Our days are numbered. Our work may not survive much longer than we do. It's important to approach our time on earth with a proper perspective—one that not only includes God but also makes Him the center of all we do. By submitting to our Creator and choosing to obey His plan for our lives, we allow the light of life to define who we are and what we do. Embracing the role God has given is what brings joy to each day. Even if an individual **lives many years**, one can **rejoice** each day knowing God is pleased. In contrast to the light of life, remember **days of darkness** (symbolizing death) are still a reality. Even the longest lives are incredibly brief when held up to the standard of eternity. That they **will be many** indicates our physical bodies will be dead a lot longer than they will be alive. That we won't live forever should motivate us to make the most of the time we have now. Enjoy this life, but never forget that our ultimate meaning and reality will be experienced in the next life. Even a brief examination of contemporary culture reveals few people living with this perspective. Some refuse to think about death and put too much emphasis on this life. Others are so obsessed with death they miss out on the joy this life can provide. Both extremes run contrary to the healthier position encouraged by Solomon. Wisdom allows us to enjoy what's available now while maintaining an eternal mindset. By noting the brevity of life on earth, Solomon wasn't belittling or denying the truth of the afterlife. Instead, he was focusing on humanity's time on earth. God created us to enjoy this life and to make a difference while we are here. Because life is short, we don't have time to waste a single day.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Ecclesiastes 11:9-10

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.*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 on page 55 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for these verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to describe how Solomon wanted his listeners to bypass regret later in life.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 56 of the PSG. Removing obstacles to joy in our lives means:

- ▶ **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.

DISCUSS: **Question #3** on page 56 of the PSG: **“What can we learn from periods of darkness in our lives that can help us in the present?”**

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, “The Obedient Life” on page 57 of the PSG to help them see the importance of obedience to a life of contentment.



Choose one of the following pictures that best represents obedience to you. Then offer a prayer of obedience to God. [PSG has four pictures from which to choose.]

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we find that reverent obedience of God is the way to enjoy the life He has given.

Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 Commentary

[Verse 9] The encouragement to **rejoice** and to **let your heart cheer you** also comes with a gentle reminder to avoid excess. The bulk of Solomon’s examination in Ecclesiastes pointed to the uselessness of completely giving oneself over to worldly pleasures. To get the most out of life, people need to practice self-discipline and self-control. Those virtues—allowing God to serve as the filter for attitudes and actions—lead to true meaning and purpose, and in turn, help individuals avoid the emptiness and futility Solomon had observed. The key to maintaining this sober and wise approach to enjoying life brings readers back around to the topic of eternity. Solomon challenged readers to follow their hearts and to participate in things that seemed fun, but to remember God would hold them accountable for each step they took. Relying on God as a filter for one’s life offers protection against straying too far to one extreme or the other, remembering that God **will bring you into judgment**, a reliable motivator for staying close to Him. From a contemporary perspective, it might be tempting to read Solomon’s words as a “free pass” that removes all consequences. But he never advocated a reckless life that feeds on the twitches of our personal passions. Instead, he charged readers to live with moderation under the authority of God’s Word. This is God’s formula for discovering meaning in life. And as repeatedly stressed, it is the only formula that actually works.

[Verse 10] Regret can be a powerful thing. Solomon wanted readers to bypass regret later in life—either from doing things they should have avoided or by neglecting things they should have done. The Teacher knew sins of omission and sins of commission look different, but they produce the same devastating results. Obviously, **vexation** and **pain** are natural parts of life. No one can avoid them fully any more than one can avoid death. But that wasn’t Solomon’s message in this verse. Removing and putting away are not about ignoring or denying struggles, but about overcoming them. In essence, the Teacher encouraged God’s people to refuse being dominated by the negatives in life. Life is a gift from God. It has potholes along the way; but in the end, we can rely on God to provide purpose and meaning, even from the hard times. If you have watched a parent or another family member age, you understand the urgency of valuing every day. Solomon pulled no punches: **youth and the dawn of life are vanity**. “Vanity” here is the same word we have encountered numerous times in this study that has described futility and emptiness. The good news is that as long as we have breath, we have hope. We can experience purpose as we find contentment in God’s plan for our lives.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

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.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ecclesiastes 12:12-14 on page 58 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for these verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to demonstrate how Solomon was pointing readers to God as the ultimate source of meaning and purpose.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 59 of the PSG: **“When have you seen reverent obedience to God lead to contentment?”**

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 59 of the PSG. 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.** Living by God’s wisdom results in righteous living.
- ▶ **Keep His commands.** When we fear the Lord we will do what He has commanded.

RECAP: 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.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 59 of the PSG: **“What are some ways our group can help one another follow the principles in this study?”**

GUIDE: Refer back to **“The Point”** for this session: **“Obedience is the key to a full life.”**

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
How would you summarize Solomon’s practical advice for finding contentment?

Ecclesiastes 12:12-14 Commentary

[Verse 12] Solomon summarized his conclusions as he closed the Book of Ecclesiastes. Life is generally futile (12:8). But unlike his earlier statement, he moved on toward something more positive. He had taught all he had learned (v. 9) and compared genuine wisdom to cattle prods and sturdy nails (v. 11), not because they are harsh, but because they move things in the right direction and provide anchors for a healthy life. But **anything beyond these** truths, even the most insightful ideas and deepest wisdom are not the final authority in life. There is **no end** to the books that could be written but **much study** wears people out. There is a danger in paying too much attention to the voices that bombard us with the wisdom of this world. Solomon wasn't warning readers to avoid learning. Instead, he was reminding them to keep learning in proper perspective. Once again, he was pointing readers to God as the ultimate source of meaning and purpose.

[Verse 13] The final verdict, from Solomon's perspective, brings everything back to God and our responsibility to obey Him. The phrase **all has been heard** indicates that the conclusion is logical. The Teacher was extensive and exhaustive in his research. What he discovered is essentially beyond dispute. He summarized his theses in two simple words: **fear God**. This is not a fear that involves terror. Appropriate fear toward God is demonstrated through a spirit of obedience. Solomon challenged his readers to go beyond lip service about how much they respected God. He told them to **keep his commandments**, to put action behind their words. This obedient fear is not simply a suggestion. It is an expectation **for . . . man**. No one, especially those who claim to be God's people, are exempt from submitting to His plans. Solomon had searched far and wide for significance and satisfaction. Through it all, he discovered two basic principles about humans: we all die and we all are ignorant of what it takes to find genuine purpose. But he also found that we can overcome each of these through absolute dependence on and obedience to God.

[Verse 14] The closing verse for Ecclesiastes returns to the theme of accountability before God. (See Eccl. 11:9.) The Lord is not surprised by anything we do. While we might try to hide from Him, He knows about **every secret thing**. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve tried to hide from God. But His question—"Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9)—provided an opportunity for the sinful humans to come clean before Him. God is omniscient (completely knowing), omnipotent (completely powerful), and omnipresent (completely present). So, the real futility in life is acting like we can fool Him. God's ultimate judgment should motivate us to serve and obey Him. And that person would also experience God's abiding presence to provide meaning and purpose. By ultimately pointing individuals toward God, Solomon gave them hope for the future. Life apart from God is empty and meaningless. But with Him, humans can become all He has made them to be. All of the Teacher's observations drive home this single point, which is still as valid today as it was centuries ago.

Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "Time and Eternity: A Hebrew Understanding" (Summer 2013), "An Allegorical End" (Summer 2006), and "It's About Time" (Fall 2005) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: Bible Studies for Life.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 60 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **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.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 60 of the PSG:

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.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking the Lord for giving us the answer to a full life. Ask Him for the strength and wisdom to share that answer with others.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

Grow with other group leaders at the [Groups Ministry blog](#).

LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry