

Ecclesiastes 5:18–6:12 | “Satisfaction in Life”

Preached on July 12, 2026 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes 5:18, as that’s where we’ll be starting, but we will also be covering all of chapter 6.

So a lot to cover this morning, but what we will learn will be so important for us to grasp.

[pauseeee]

Everyone is looking for satisfaction in life, yet there are myriads of unsatisfied, unhappy people.

[pause]

How can this be? How is it that such a common goal would so commonly not be attained?

[pauseeee]

“More!” is the resounding cry of hearts.

“Not enough!” is the ringing refrain of the human soul. *[pause]*

People are longing, grasping, clawing for something new, something additional, something different—just *something* that will satisfy them. *[pause]*

They look for it in money, clothing, or stuff.

They try to find it in approval, “likes” and “followers,” as well as fame. *[pause]*

They are searching for that ‘answer’ that will solve their problem, that ‘water’ that will quench their thirst, that ‘key’ that will unlock the door. *[pauseeee]*

Author Ford Madox Ford once said, “It is a...fantastic world. Why can’t people have what they want? *[pause]*

The things were all there to content everybody; yet everybody has got the wrong thing. Perhaps you can make head or tail of it; it is beyond me.”¹ *[pause]*

That’s the conundrum, isn’t it?

Our world is absolutely brimming with good things, yet people are not content. *[pauseeee]*

I want to show you a painting that depicts this reality. *[SHOW SLIDE]*

This is a painting called, *The Moneylender and His Wife*, by Quentin Massys. *[pause]*

It’s said that, as the moneylender looks carefully at a single coin, “his wife is sitting next to him with a Bible or religious book open in front of her, appearing to be interrupted in her reading...

[pause]

¹ Ford Madox Ford in *The Good Soldier*.

Her eye is drawn...to the coin her husband so carefully examines. *[pausee]*

Massys did the painting to show how easily money can distract us from the worship of God.”²
[pauseee]

How many of us are like that—we are so easily lured away from God and to the things of this world, thinking that they are better, or that they will satisfy. *[pauseee]*

This dissatisfaction in life is not a novel thing, but here in Ecclesiastes, the author speaks about it. *[pausee]*

So how can a person find satisfaction in life?

To answer that question, we will be given two portraits in our passage. *[pause]*

So portrait #1...

I. The good and fitting way to live. (5:18–20)

Let’s READ Ecclesiastes 5:18–20 to see this. *[READ]*

Have you ever watched someone live and thought to yourself, “Now *that’s* the right way to live”?
[pause]

Maybe it was someone who was kind to others, or served others well. *[pause]*

These “portraits” that we see around us impact us and motivate us to live differently.

Well that’s the kind of thing that Solomon wants to do in our hearts and minds.

He will put before us the “good and fitting” way to live, so that we would be pushed to live differently. *[pauseee]*

Many people believe that your life is what you make of it, and so they say that you can just create the life that you want to live, and it doesn’t matter what that is.

But that way of thinking assumes that *any* way of life is good, while the Bible shows us that there is a “good and fitting” one. *[pauseee]*

How you live your life matters, and so the question is: are you trying to live how you want, or how God has laid out? *[pause]*

What we will find is that God’s way is truly *better*. *[pauseee]*

What is this way of life? Verse 18 says, “[It] is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun.” *[pauseee]*

² Edward M. Curtis, *Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, *Teach the Text Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 58–59.

What's said here is astounding because it deals with the simple, ordinary things of life. [pause]

It didn't say you have to take a certain amount of amazing vacations in your lifetime. [pause]

It didn't say that you had to accomplish amazing feats, accrue mounds of money, or something like that. [pause]

This means that the 'good and fitting life' is possible for even the most ordinary person. [pauseeee]

We *all* eat and drink.

We *all* toil, even if we don't have a full-time job, because toil is broader than that. [pause]

There is a good and fitting way to live, but the question is whether you will follow it. [pauseeee]

This way of life includes eating and drinking.

But this is not talking about the basic fact of eating and drinking, for remember the miserable man of last week's passage, who ate in darkness, vexation, sickness, and anger? [pause]

That means that this way of life is finding *joy and contentment* in eating and drinking. [pauseeee]

There is a certain pleasure that God has provided us when we eat and drink good food and drink. [pauseee]

Think of the joy of that amazing meal that you were waiting all day to eat. [pause]

Think of the satisfaction of a hearty meal after a long day's work. [pause]

God has given us these simple joys to be *enjoyed*! [pauseeee]

This means that we are not to take food and drink for granted. [pause]

We should enjoy and take pleasure in how the Lord has graciously given us these things...

They may be simple blessings, but may we never forget that they are *blessings*. [pauseeee]

How often do we just gobble down a meal without even thanking God for it? [pause]

How often do we fail to appreciate our food and drink? [pauseeeee]

We are also to "find enjoyment in all the toil which one toils under the sun." [pause]

Now to some of you, you may be thinking, "Find enjoyment in my toil?! Yeah, right!" [pauseeee]

Now obviously toil is toilsome, but there are joys that come from our toil. [pause]

There's the joy of building or creating something.

Haven't you ever stood back and found joy in seeing a job well done? *[pause]*

There's the joy of serving others through our efforts, or providing for our family. *[pause]*

Even the simple fact that I have the ability to 'move' and 'do' should fill me with gratitude. *[pauseeee]*

My question for you is, do you ever experience these joys? *[pauseeee]*

Due to our complaining hearts, we overlook these simple blessings.

We go to work thinking, "Ugh, just another day at the office, and it's going to be miserable." *[pause]*

When we do that, we miss out on things that we could enjoy.

So why not think, "I am so blessed to be able to go to work, so that I can provide for my family"? or, "Isn't it amazing that I can serve others through what I'm doing?" *[pause]*

Why not take joy in seeing a project completed or a task done? *[pauseeee]*

Now this is not to say that we are to act like the hard things aren't hard, but it's to reframe our mindset to remember that there is joy to be found. *[pauseeee]*

Our problem is that we expect life to be what it's not...

We expect no pain and no hardship, and for life to be continually amazing every single day, whereby we live in comfort and ease. *[pause]*

In fact, we often think, "I *deserve* that kind of life." *[pauseeee]*

Realize that that's a dream world of our own making.

Come back down to earth, and see life *as it is*. *[pause]*

When you do so, you'll realize that even the basic fact of eating and drinking and toiling are gifts from God. *[pauseeee]*

That we get to experience *any good* in this life is a testament to the mercy of God.

He's the God who, "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."³ *[pauseeee]*

We sinned against God and so live in a sin-cursed world, and that means that any good we experience is grace. *[pauseeee]*

³ Matthew 5:45.

We live only a “few days,” but will we waste them in grumbling and resentment, or will we find joy and contentment in the ordinary, everyday things of life? *[pauseee]*

Though these days are few, they have been given to us by God.

So do you ever wake up and say, “Thank you, Lord, for another day”? *[pauseeee]*

This life of ours, with its few days and simple joys, is our lot. *[pause]*

We can’t add more years to our lives.

We can’t get rid of eating, drinking, or toiling. *[pause]*

In mankind’s pride, we think that we can alter the world in some drastic way, or change these fundamental things, but we can’t.

The life that we have is the lot that God has given to us. *[pauseee]*

Likewise, your life, your job, your gifts, your family, your time, your circumstances, and your relationships are your lot. *[pauseee]*

Are you thankful for the good things, or only focused on what you don’t have? *[pauseeeee]*

The key to a good life then is not to try to control or manipulate life, but to accept life as it is, finding joy in the good things around you. *[pause]*

Instead of grumbling and being in agony everyday, due to what we *think* life should be like, we should enjoy the good things of life.

So open your eyes to the ordinary, everyday blessings around you! *[pauseeee]*

The truth is that the things that you have *and* the ability to enjoy them are gifts from God. *[pause]*

We see that in verses 19–20...

“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.” *[pauseeee]*

We can easily understand that the things that we have are God-given, but this passage teaches us more...

God *also* gives us the ability to enjoy those things, the power to accept our lot, and the capability of rejoicing in our toil. *[pauseee]*

This means that you can't depend on yourself to enjoy life, but you must rely on God to help you. *[pause]*

You can't just say, "I'll just accept my lot," but you should call out to God, "Lord, please help me to accept my lot in life." *[pauseee]*

Oh, what amazing grace—the things that I have *and* the ability to enjoy them is from the Lord. *[pause]*

Every breath I take, every gift I enjoy, every moment of contentment, every pleasure of seeing a job well done is from God.

So how could we NOT live a life of gratitude? *[pauseeee]*

When we live this way, verse 20 explains that God empowers us to not dwell upon the harsh realities of life, for we will be occupied with joy. *[pause]*

Unlike the man of Ecclesiastes 5:17, who ate his food in bitter misery, we can be people who eat with joy, grateful for whatever lot God has given to us. *[pauseeee]*

Joy in life, then, is not found in simply having a positive attitude, but in seeing life as a gift of God. *[pauseeeee]*

So we got 'the good way to live' up front, but now we will find the wrong way to live next...

II. Portrait #2: The tragic way to live. (6:1–9)

Some people have so much going for them, but they waste it all, and it's a tragedy. *[pause]*

Howard Hughes is a prime example of that...

Hughes inherited a fortune at the age of 18, and went on to make Hollywood films, do pioneering work in aviation, and owned a portion of Las Vegas. *[pause]*

But he was always looking for more, and then eventually ended up withdrawn, isolated, hooked on drugs, and malnourished.⁴ *[pauseee]*

What a sad story, and Solomon points out that kind of tragic life here in chapter 6—so let's READ it. *[READ 6:1–12]*

The author mentions that there's this evil that lies heavy on mankind.

And that word 'evil' doesn't have the meaning of something 'wicked,' but rather, it's something that's a tragedy, misfortune, or disaster. *[pauseeee]*

⁴ Details found at: <https://history.howstuffworks.com/historical-figures/howard-hughes.htm> & <https://www.britannica.com/money/Howard-Hughes>.

This tragic portrait begins with describing a person who seems to have it all: he has wealth, possessions, and honor.

And that's not all, for "he lacks nothing of all that he desires." *[pause]*

This person gets whatever he wants. *[pause]*

If he wanted a new house, he got it.

If he wanted to build a new garden, it's his.

Any food or drink, any possession, he was able to get it. *[pauseeee]*

This is what is often seen as the ideal, blessed life in our world. *[pause]*

Many in our country would say, "Oh, what I wouldn't give to have that kind of life!"

"If only I had that life, then I would be content." *[pause]*

But here's the thing: though this person had it all, he didn't enjoy it all.

Verse 2 says, "Yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them." *[pauseeee]*

This person gets whatever he wants, but isn't satisfied—he's always looking for 'more.' *[pause]*

This shows us something important: getting what you want and enjoying what you have aren't the same thing...

Possession doesn't equal enjoyment. *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever wanted something so bad, finally got it, and was disappointed? *[pause]*

Have you ever gotten something that you wanted, but then not long after, you wanted something else?

That's the kind of thing that Solomon is talking about. *[pause]*

The mere presence of good things are not the key to satisfaction and contentment! *[pauseeee]*

What did we find out earlier?...

That joy and contentment themselves are a gift from God, and here we see that God does not give *this* person the power to enjoy them. *[pauseeee]*

One reason why God didn't give him the power to enjoy whatever he got may be because he didn't see them as God-given gifts.

It was all about what he wanted, what he strove for, what he attained himself. *[pause]*

That's not the way that joy and contentment work—they aren't acquired through our works, but received as a gift. *[pause]*

You can't look to things to satisfy you because they won't do the trick.

Instead, contentment in life is something God-given, so look to God for satisfaction in life! *[pauseeee]*

What's the difference between the good and fitting way of life and the tragic life? *[pause]*

They both received good things, but one enjoyed them and the other always wanted more. *[pause]*

One saw them as precious gifts, while the other saw them as things to consume. *[pauseeee]*

This is a "sickening tragedy"!⁵

While our world may lift up that kind of life as the ideal, the Bible shows it to be a *tragedy*. *[pauseeee]*

To emphasize how horrible it is, the author makes the point that a stillborn child is better off than this person. *[pause]*

He even mentions fathering a hundred children and living many years because lots of children and lots of years were what were valued in that day, and was seen as the blessed life.

But Solomon says that a person could have *all of that*, and yet be worse off than a stillborn child. *[pause]*

The reason? Because this person wasted their life on pursuit and didn't experience true, lasting pleasure. *[pause]*

It may have been a long life, but it was a long, wasted life. *[pause]*

As the Jamieson, Faussett, and Brown commentary puts it: "Long life, without enjoying real good, is but lengthened misery."⁶ *[pauseeee]*

Life is not only about the quantity of years, but the quality of years. *[pause]*

This person may have lived many years, but he did not find any enjoyment or satisfaction.

So both this person and the stillborn child don't actually experience the good things of life, but one of them doesn't experience all of the difficulties, while the other does. *[pauseee]*

⁵ A phrase that the CSB version uses to translate the end of Eccl. 6:2.

⁶ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 408.

Neither is good, of course, but the person who wasted his life on amassing more, but never enjoyed it, is worse off. *[pause]*

What's the use of that kind of life, knowing that we all eventually die? *[pauseeee]*

What a radical thing to think about: always wanting more is a miserable way of life, no matter how much you gain. *[pause]*

Changes your perspective, doesn't it? *[pauseeee]*

This dissatisfaction in life runs deep and wide among humanity, for verse 7 says, "All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied." *[pause]*

So even though people strive and strive to be satisfied with the things of this world, they are not satisfied in their soul.⁷ *[pauseee]*

In fact, earthly wisdom and skill in living do not provide the key to contentment, as verse 8 points out.

"What advantage? None." *[pause]*

That's why verse 9 puts it this way, "Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite." *[pauseeee]*

You could say it this way, "It's better to enjoy what you have than to be constantly looking for more." *[pauseeee]*

Do you have a "wandering appetite," or do you gratefully enjoy what God has given to you? *[pauseeee]*

In the 1800's, a Frenchman named, Alexis de Tocqueville, visited America and wrote a book about his observations. *[pause]*

This is what he said, "The inhabitant of the United States attaches himself to the goods of this world as if he were assured of not dying..."

And he rushes so precipitately to grasp those that pass within his reach that one would say he fears at each instant he will cease to live before he has enjoyed them. *[pause]*

He grasps them all but without clutching them, and he soon allows them to escape from his hands so as to run after new enjoyments...*[pause]*

Death finally comes, and it stops him before he has grown weary of this useless pursuit of a complete felicity that always flees from him."⁸ *[pauseeee]*

⁷ The word translated by the ESV as "appetite" in 6:7 is actually the Hebrew word for "soul."

⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 511–14. Quoted by Andrew Wilson, *Remaking the World: How 1776 Created the Post-Christian West* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 159.

What a tragic way to live. *[pausee]*

Without God, you will live a life of never being satisfied, yet constantly trying to find it in the next thing, the next experience, the next adventure. *[pausee]*

Do you really want to waste your life always searching, or will you be content and enjoy what God has given to you? *[pauseeee]*

Chapter 6 finishes out by reminding us that we aren't God in verses 10–12. *[pause]*

It's *God* who's in control, ordains all things, and sets life how it is.

So you cannot argue with God, nor do you know everything, so remember your place. *[pause]*

You do not control life, so you must *receive it* from the hand of God. *[pausee]*

It's when you remember that foundational truth, that you can start enjoying the good things of life as it is, instead of trying to manipulate it in vain frustration. *[pause]*

Therefore, remember...

You're not God, so gratefully receive your life and lot as gifts from God! (6:10–12)

Our world will try to say that life is what you make it, and that you have the power to change anything.

But you are not God, you are a *limited creation* of God. *[pause]*

It's God who's in control, who gives you what you have, gives you the years of your life, and gives you your lot.

So stop trying to *be* God, and remember that you are wholly dependent *on* Him. *[pausee]*

It's then that you can start to gratefully receive your life and lot as gifts from God...

And now every glimmer of good is glistening with grace for you see it all as a gift. *[pause]*

Now you can actually enjoy what you have, instead of always longing for more. *[pauseeee]*

We need to reorient our minds in accordance with what is true.

Because the mentality that gets us to be grumbling discontents is that we think that we are in control and deserve everything that we want. *[pause]*

But the truth is the opposite: I am not God, but was created by God, and I don't deserve anything, for I sinned against Him.

Therefore, anything I have is an undeserved gift. *[pauseeee]*

This reminds me of Adam and Eve...

Adam and Eve were created by God, and were given their lives and lot. *[pause]*

They were given food to eat as a precious gift, and work to do and rejoice in.

But instead of gratefully receiving what they were given, they greedily wanted *more*, for they thought that it would satisfy. *[pause]*

Instead, what happened?...

It didn't satisfy, but made things infinitely worse, as they chose the tragic path of independence, rather than the good and fitting path of God-dependence. *[pauseeee]*

Due to their sin, we have all sinned and don't deserve anything good in life.

Yet God in His love and mercy has given us sun, rain, food and drink, among many other things. *[pause]*

But more than, He has given us the precious gift of His Son to die for our sins. *[pause]*

When we receive Him in faith, we are forgiven, given eternal life, and blessed beyond measure. *[pause]*

In Him, we find what our soul longs for, and can find satisfaction and rest. *[pauseeee]*

I'll end with this...

In 1 Timothy 6:17, Paul writes a verse that connects directly with what we learned. *[pause]*

It's directed towards the rich, but applies to each of us, and it says this...

"As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything *to enjoy*."⁹ *[pauseeee]*

Is your hope set on God, who gives you everything to enjoy? *[pause]*

It's in Him, we find satisfaction. *[pause]*

And do you actually *enjoy* what's been given?

⁹ Italics added by me.