

MAKING ROOM FOR Life

MAKING ROOM FOR LIFE: TRADING CHAOTIC LIFESTYLES FOR CONNECTED RELATIONSHIPS

“RESTRUCTURING OUR RELATIONSHIPS AND TIME”

This is the second lesson in a four-part series entitled *Making Room for Life*. The first lesson in the series identified a problem we all face, “crowded loneliness.” God created us for community, but our contemporary lifestyle precludes us from experiencing it fully. In effect we have traded what is more valuable for what is less valuable, our birthright for a mess of pottage. The solution to this problem is not more of the same. The pursuit of the “good life” blessed by our materialistic culture, and its attendant accumulation of more and more stuff, something we tirelessly fund by working more and more hours, is part of the problem not its solution.

You don't have to be a religious type to see what's going on. Robert H. Frank, Godwin Smith Professor of Economics, Ethics and Public Policy at Cornell University writes in his book *Luxury Fever*, “Even among those who can easily afford today's luxury offerings, there has been a price to pay. All of us – rich and poor alike, but especially the rich – are spending more time at the office and taking shorter vacations; we are spending less time with our families and friends; and we have less time for sleep, exercise, travel, reading, and other activities that help maintain body and soul. At a time when our

spending on luxury goods is growing four times as fast as overall spending, our highways, bridges, water supply systems, and other parts of our public infrastructure are deteriorating, placing lives in danger. Our parks and streets are becoming dirtier and more congested. Poverty and drug abuse are on the rise, and violent crime, though down from its recent historical peaks in some cities, continues at high levels. A growing percentage of middle- and upper-income families seek refuge behind the walls of gated residential communities” (5).

Solomon saw the nexus of the problem in his day and commented on it – proving again there really is “nothing new under the sun.” He wrote, “If you love money, you will never be satisfied; if you long to be rich, you will never get all you want. It is useless” (Ecc. 5:10 TEV).

The solution is, in fact, two-fold. Randy writes, “The solution to our problem of crowded loneliness involves a restructuring of our relationships and our time” (*Making Room for Life*, 37). If we want to experience biblical community, we are going to have to trade our *linear relationships* for a *circle of community* and follow what he calls, “the Hebrew Day Planner.”

Your Initial Reaction

How serious is our situation – or is it?



1

Look Closely – observe what you are reading.

Ecclesiastes 5:10-12 NIV

[10] Whoever loves money never has money enough;

whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.

This too is meaningless.

[11] As goods increase, so do those who consume them.

And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?

[12] The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much,

but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.

Ecclesiastes 5:10-12 TEV

[10] If you love money, you will never be satisfied;

If you long to be rich, you will never get all you want.

It is useless.

[11] The richer you are, the more mouths you must feed.

All you gain is the knowledge that you are rich.

[12] A working man may or may not have enough to eat,

but at least he can get a good night's sleep.

A rich man, however, has so much that he stays awake worrying.

• Reading to gain an impression – record your thoughts. (3rd Grade – Adult)

• Reading again to see the details (5th Grade – Adult)

In the New International Version (NIV)

- Underline the words “never . . . enough” and “never satisfied” in v. 10.
- Draw a line from the word “money” to the word “wealth” in the same verse.
- Draw another line from the word “money” to the word “income” in the same verse.
- Highlight the last line of v. 10, “This too is meaningless.”
- Circle the word “but” indicating contrast in v. 12.
- Underline the phrases “of a laborer” and “of a rich man” in v. 12.
- Draw a line from the word “sleep” to the words “no sleep” in the same verse.
- Draw another line from the word “little” to the word “abundance” in the same verse.

In Today's English Version (TEV)

- Highlight the last sentence in v. 10, “It is useless.”



2

Think Carefully – interpret what you have read.

• Recognizing the message of the passages (5th Grade – Adult)

The book of Ecclesiastes is undoubtedly one of the most misunderstood books in the Bible. Christians have tended either to ignore its message or to regard its contents as the ranting of a man apart from God. Given this assessment, inspiration assures the accuracy of the author’s testimony but not necessarily the truthfulness of his words or the reliability of his conclusions, which are, after all, the words and conclusions of a man concerned with life “under the sun.” But such a negative view and others like it hardly make sense. As one author writes, “It does not seem worthy of God to occupy valuable space in the Bible with the arguments of the skeptic and of the natural man. We can buy those anywhere or have them for nothing” (J. Stafford Wright, “The Interpretation of Ecclesiastes,” in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament*, 133).

A more positive view makes better sense. The theme of the book is announced in the preface (1:1), affirmed in the conclusion (12:8), and repeated throughout. Solomon concludes his observations on various aspects of life by declaring “everything is meaningless” (NIV) or “vanity” (NKJV, NRSV, NASB). The Hebrew word *hebel* translated “meaningless” refers to that which is unsubstantial or lacking real value, occasionally that which is transitory or obscure. Among the things labeled meaningless are: work (1:14; 2:11, 17; 4:4, 7-8), wisdom (2:15), righteousness (8:14), wealth (2:26; 5:10; 6:2), prestige (4:16), pleasure (2:1-2), youth and vigor (11:10), life (6:12; 7:15; 9:9), and even everything to come after death (11:8). This is not to say that human endeavors have no value whatsoever, but in the context of a search for the key to the ultimate meaning of man’s existence, none of these unlocks the door. “All life is vanity in this sense, that it is unable to give us the key to itself. The book [of Ecclesiastes] is the record of a search for the key to life. It is an endeavor to give meaning to life, to see it as a whole. And there is no key under the sun. Life has lost the key to itself. ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.’ If you want the key you must go to the locksmith who made the lock. ‘God holds the key of all unknown.’ And He will not give it to you. Since then you cannot get the key, you must trust the locksmith to open the doors” (140). Solomon demonstrated that everything is meaningless to persuade people that the meaning of life cannot be inferred from, neither does it reside in, any of the activities of life, and to drive them to trust in God alone (Donald R. Glenn, “Ecclesiastes” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 977).

This week’s passage, Ecclesiastes 5:10-12, belongs to a larger section (5:1 - 6:9) in which Solomon argues that man’s *raison d’être*, reason for being, is not the accumulation of wealth. After all, one’s wealth may be lost through making a rash vow (1-7), extorted by corrupt officials (8, 9), not be enjoyed because of one’s own covetousness (10-12), and bring one misery (13-17). The only thing a person can do then, is enjoy his money and possessions as a gift from God (5:18 - 6:9). Unfortunately, many today are “accumulationists,” who are trying to find the meaning of life in a “religion of materialism,” and along the way are sacrificing any possible involvement in community to do so.

The Point of this Lesson

The life you long for cannot be bought with money, nor can it be found in the things money can buy; you have to restructure your relationships and your time to discover it.

• Digging deeper into its meaning (5th Grade – Adult)

v. 10 *meaningless* The Hebrew word *hebel* translated here has a variety of meanings. “Elsewhere [it] refers concretely to a breath, a wind, or a vapor (e.g., Prov. 21:6; Isa. 57:13). In Ecclesiastes several phrases are used parallel to *hebel*: “chasing after the wind” (Ecc. 1:14; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 16; 6:9), “no advantage” (3:19; cf. 5:11; 6:8), “nothing... gained” (2:11; cf. 2:22; 3:9; 5:16; 6:11). Thus metaphorically this Hebrew word means what is unsubstantial or without real value. Occasionally it also refers metaphorically to some other characteristics of wind or vapor: (a) what is fleeting or transitory (cf. 6:12 where it is parallel to “few” [days] and “days he passes through like a shadow,” 3:19; 7:15; 9:9; 11:10); (b) what is enigmatic or perplexing (cf. 6:2; 8:10, 14); or (c) what is unseen and obscure (cf. 11:8)” (Glenn, 976). In 6:10 it seems to refer to that which is ironic or perplexing, the one who loves money never has enough to satisfy him. One would think that more money would bring more satisfaction to him who loves money, but it doesn’t work that way; it works the other way around.

• Answering Interpretive Questions - For older learners (5th Grade – Adult)

1. Explain the assertion “covetousness is futile” in light of verse 10.

2. It’s not so much the filthy lucre itself as the stuff money can buy that we covet. Give an example of something you wanted and worked hard for that didn’t deliver on your expectations or that you now seldom enjoy.

3. Derek Kidner writes, “If anything is worse than the addiction money brings, it is the emptiness it leaves.” (*A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance*, 56). What do you think of his statement?

4. Put the meaning of verse 11 in your own words.

5. Explain the contrast in verse 12.

6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the pursuit of the “good life” is arguably the single greatest obstacle to experiencing biblical community?

7. Recall the number of relational worlds you have to manage from last week, e.g. spouse, children, in-laws, friends, coworkers, people at church, etc. If your relationship to the individuals in these worlds is *linear*, they will have few meaningful relationships to one another. If numbers of them have meaningful relationships to one another, your relationship to them is *circular* rather than linear. They form your relational community. Why would you want to trade a host of linear contacts for a circle of community?

8. Randy writes, “The challenge is to find the *center place* that allows you to integrate as many relationships and activities as possible into a circle” (51, italics added). What do you think of his suggestion that neighborhood is the best “center place” for community?

9. If you restructured your relationships to make your neighborhood, or people who lived in proximity to you, the center place of your circle of community, how would it simplify and improve your life?

10. Randy writes, “Most people today have a daily and weekly pattern that is unbalanced and not sustainable over the long haul. I’ve suggested in previous chapters that if we continue to live this way, it will kill us.” Confirm or refute his statement from personal observation.

11. The Hebrew Day Planner, which divides the twenty-four hour day into a twelve-hour period (6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.), a four-hour period (6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.), and an eight-hour period (10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.) governs the three major activities of each day – *productivity, relationships, and sleep* – by night and day. Do you agree that we should restructure our time to fit this pattern? Explain.

12. Consider the extent to which your current schedule coincides with the Hebrew Day Planner. Why do you think restructuring your time to fit this pattern would be worth the effort?

3 Respond wisely – apply what you have read. (5th Grade – Adult)

• How might Christ followers respond to the message of this passage?

1. Consider whether your pursuit of “the good life” is robbing you of a better life.
2. Take one or more steps to consolidate your relational worlds.
3. Take one or more steps to bring your schedule into line with the Hebrew Day Planner.
4. Consider why you’re too busy to get connected to community and what that indicates.
5. Relate the message of this passage to your life. How might you live differently tomorrow based on the point of this lesson?

4 Gather together – discuss what you have read.

• For older learners (5th Grade – Adult)

1. Read together this week’s passage from Step 1 or your Bible.
2. Read “Recognizing the message of the passage” along with the point of the lesson in Step 2.
3. Discuss your individual responses in Step 3.

• For families

In this series, you will find one family night activity each week. Depending on the age of your children, you will pick and choose from the ideas below.

Pray

Pray that the Lord would lead you to answers concerning the “restructuring of your relationships and time.” As you ponder the lifestyle of the Bedouin Shepherd, creating a circle of relationships and beginning the Hebrew Day Planner, pray for wisdom and unity.

Act

With your family, create a map of your street or neighborhood. Draw squares for each house. Write the names of the families that you know inside of their square. Pray over your neighborhood map. Then think of a way to reach out to a family in your neighborhood. This is a great beginning to creating a circle of relationships. Here are some ideas below.

1. Invite a family over for soup or to play.
2. Create a baked treat and take it to a family.
3. Create cards that read “Don’t snicker. I really mean it. It’s great to be your neighbor.” Attach a small Snickers candy bar to each one and pass out to each of your neighbors.
4. Host a neighborhood party around a sporting event or holiday.

Discuss

As a family, talk about your neighborhood map and ways you could eventually write the names of every family on your map. Talk about any activities and linear relationships that you could dissolve in order to focus on the circle of relationships found in your neighborhood. Then discuss how you could begin using the Hebrew Day Planner in your family.

• Suggestions for Small Groups

1. Read *Making Room for Life* and select topics you want to discuss from the list found at the end of each chapter.
2. Discuss the importance of proximity to community.
3. Discuss whether restructuring your relationships and time is feasible for you.
4. Discuss how your group can help each other restructure their relationships and time.

About the Authors

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