

Week 23

June 4 - 10

Song of Songs 1-8; Ecclesiastes 1-12; 1 Kings 11:1-17:7;
2 Chronicles 9:29-17:19

The theme for this week is simplicity. This concept is brought out especially in the book of Ecclesiastes. We are not looking at simplicity as the ultimate goal of life during this week, for bringing pleasure to God is our greatest purpose. Rather, we are studying and thinking about simplicity because of the many connections that exist between obediently following God, making wise decisions and living a simple life. –David Curtis

June 4th

Song of Songs 1-8. "Rejoice in the Wife of Your Youth"

God created sex (Gen 2:24-25) and blesses it in the proper context of a committed, loving marriage relationship. This book is a beautiful description of the intimate relationship that takes place between a husband and a wife.

Many have wondered how Solomon, the author of this book, could have written such a beautiful love poem considering his 700 wives and 300 concubines. It is most likely written about his relationship with his first wife, the daughter of Pharaoh. The playfulness and intimacy they share is reflective of a simpler time in Solomon's reign before the building projects and rapid expansion of his wealth and influence. Solomon had it all – God's blessing, money, wisdom, power, influence and women. And yet the more he had, the worse his relationship with God became.

Many lives have been complicated and painfully compounded as a result of extramarital affairs. Not only is it an obedience issue, it makes for a far simpler life if we heed Proverbs 5:18, "Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth."

June 5th

1 Kings 11:1-43; 2 Chronicles 9:29-31; Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. "Simple Faith"

Solomon inherited a peaceful kingdom from his father David. Early in his reign Solomon and his people enjoyed living in peace (1 Kings 4:24-25). In all his wisdom, Solomon did not realize that the success of his Kingdom and the peace that he and his people enjoyed was dependent upon his obedience to the Lord.

As we read today, Solomon's life and reign as king became increasingly more complicated as his heart wandered from the Lord. He was constantly building new and different shrines and altars as he attempted to keep his many wives happy. Then there were the political issues and the Lord raised up different adversaries to Solomon.

Instead of chasing religion like Solomon, we ought to be more like the blind man in John 9, who experienced healing at the hands (and spit) of Jesus. When he was questioned about the one who healed him, he said, "I don't know whether he is a sinner, but I know this; I was blind, and now I can see" (John 9:25).

June 6th

Ecclesiastes 1:12-6:12. "Man in the Mirror"

The book of Ecclesiastes is filled with numerous observations about how life tends to work in general. Written by Solomon towards the end of his life, it is a reflection on much of what he has learned. Solomon lived a far from simple life and, in this book, he recounts some of his attempts to enjoy life.

Why does life have to be so complicated? The main reason life gets complicated is because of the person staring back at you in the mirror. Like Solomon we strive after money, power, career success, pleasure and knowledge in our efforts to bring meaning to our lives.

Rather than pursuing these avenues, we are to find our meaning and purpose in God. God is the one who establishes our purpose and destiny (Eccl. 6:10). We are to fear God (3:14; 5:7) and enjoy the benefits of the work he has for us to do (3:13; 5:12).

Are you fighting against God in your life? Are you striving for those things that do not satisfy? Try simplifying your life. Tell that person in the mirror that God is in control and you will find meaning and purpose in Him.

June 7th

Ecclesiastes 7:1-11: 6. "The Best Things in Life are Free"

Have you ever had a chance to sit on the beach and enjoy the sunset? Another sight that I really enjoy is to watch the sunrise over the alfalfa fields of the high desert in the fall with the cool air of a frosty morning surrounding me. Of course, these sights pale in comparison to that of my young daughter's smile.

In writing Ecclesiastes, Solomon makes it clear that enjoying the simple things in life is okay, and I think it even brings pleasure to God. In the second half of this book we read that we can enjoy prosperity (7:14), eating (8:15), drinking (8:15), life (8:15) and marriage (9:9).

Life is something that is meant to be enjoyed. It is a gift from God and it is a desire of God to see His children enjoying His gift. We are still living in God's creation and He is still that author and sustainer of life even though the world has been tainted by sin. Remember, "Whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all Heaven's lights..." (James 1:17).

June 8th

Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:14; 1 Kings 12:1-33; 2 Chronicles 10:1-11:17. "Honor God in Your Youth"

I have a problem. You may very well have the same problem. I often find myself thinking that it will be easier to honor God and make Him more of a priority in my life down the road. If I can just survive until some day in the future, life will be better and easier, right? Not necessarily.

The older I get the more I realize that if I don't make the changes now, I probably won't do it in the future.

Solomon exhorts his readers to "Honor God in your youth" (Eccl. 12:1). We are not to wait until we are older to take God seriously, but rather we are to do it today.

A while back, my wife and I enjoyed the movie *The Last Holiday*. In that movie, the lead character made a decision to enjoy life and start working towards her dreams. As you can imagine, her life changed drastically and she finally truly enjoyed her life.

It took a doctor's report that she was dying in order to change her life. What will it take for you to really start living today? When will you make God and His perfect will for your life a priority?

June 9th

1 Kings 13:1-15:15, 25-34; 2 Chronicles 11:18-15:19. "Simplicity is not Guaranteed"

We have been thinking some this week about the connection between obediently following God and living a simple life. While it is true that our own sin often complicates life, it is not the only reason why life can be difficult and complicated. It is no small thing to live a simple life that results from making wise choices.

Sometimes life is difficult, not because of any fault of our own, but because of the decisions of those around us. In 1 Kings 15 we read of two different kings of Judah, Abijam and Asa. One of them, Abijam, was not right with God; the other, Asa, remained faithful to the LORD throughout his life. In spite of this difference we read that both of these kings dealt with constant wars with Israel during their reigns. So even though he walked with God, Asa experienced the same political difficulties as Abijam. In fact, when you think about it, doing what is right and walking with God can sometimes make life more complicated, not simpler. May you have the courage to walk with God regardless of how difficult life may become.

June 10th

1 Kings 15:16-24; 16:1-17:7; 2 Chronicles 16:1-17:19. "Cost of Success"

"If you just ignored your family you would have time to get it all done."

As I thought about this comment my wife jokingly made to me as we talked about the disheveled state of our van, I realized that she was right. I could accomplish a lot more in life by ignoring all of the people that I cared the most about. And in reality, many people achieve success by this method, but at what cost.

Today you read a brief statement about the man who rebuilt Jericho. Certainly, it must have been a proud accomplishment for him. The only downside was that it resulted in the death of two sons because of the curses spoken by Joshua son of Nun (Josh. 16:34).

Achieving success in life is a driving force for many people. However, at what point do the costs associated with that success become too great. We may not cause someone to lose their life because of our success, but if we ignore loved ones or neglect relationships, the pain and hurt we can cause is immeasurable.

General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

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Bible Discussion Guide:

Make a list of everyone who would be affected if you were to have an extramarital affair.

In what ways is life more complicated when we engage in multiple romantic relationships?

Why do you think so many people pursue other religions instead of remaining true to the God of the Bible?

Is it wrong to have a simple faith? What did the man born blind do right regarding his confession of faith in John 9?

Make a list of the various ways that we can complicate rather than simplify our lives?

How does finding your meaning and purpose in God help to simplify and clarify life?

What are your favorite sights to enjoy in this world?

How do you find balance between enjoying God's creation and becoming too worldly in how you live?

If you could change one thing regarding your relationship with God right now, what would it be?

What is holding you back from making the change you just shared in the previous question?

In what ways has choosing to follow God actually made life more complicated for you?

Why doesn't God always make life easier and simpler for people of faith?

When is the cost of success too high?

Personal application: If your life were to end tonight, would you be happy with the success you have achieved? Would you be happy with the relationships you have maintained in your life?