

The Essential Ingredient

Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:12



Misplaced Hopes

Putting our hope in...
what can't help
the very thing that makes it worse

Hoping for the most important things in life: peace, joy, wholeness, rest, ...

"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." *Psalm 139:23-24*

On the one hand

For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them;
but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm. *Proverbs 1:32-33*

On the other

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised. *Job 1:21b*

Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:12

8-9: Systemic oppression of the poor is an age old problem that isn't going to end (until Jesus returns)

10-12: Wealth never satisfies

13-15: Wealth steals from its owners

16-17: Wealth steals from its owners

18-20: True blessing is only from God

6:1-2: Without God's blessing, all is meaningless

6:3-6: Even great gifts are nothing without God's blessing

6:7-9: Riches and poverty, wisdom and folly are meaningless without God's blessing

6:10-12: God is over all. We only have what God gives

The Big Idea

"Shalom" comes from God alone

Joy / Peace / Rest / Wholeness / Contentment

Mirage

It claims to give what it cannot give

Claims: peace, joy, contentment, rest, ...

The mirages: Money / Family / Honor / Time / Self fulfillment / ...

Everything but God is a mirage!

It promises to give what it often takes away

Application

1) Pursue shalom from God alone

before, during, and after every other good

whether or not we have any other good

"Feast on God"

Pray, meditate, worship, obey, fellowship with others, ...

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 1:28

"We lift our cup, whether full or empty, to God"

"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." *Philippians 4:12-13*

The secret of contentment: trusting God (head / heart / hands)

"I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing." *Psalm 16:2*



“We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.” Psalm 33:20

2) Know what pulls your heart from God

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” Matthew 6:13

We take action “in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.” 2 Corinthians 2:11

“When you sit to dine with a ruler, note well what is before you,
and put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony.” Proverbs 23:1-2

Whether you have much or little or none

God knows our hearts, even if we can hide them from others or from ourselves

“Search me and know me...”

3) Fast for a season (if it is a good resource)

“If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” Matthew 5:30

Better to go without this good than risk falling

“[God] humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” Deuteronomy 8:3

Stop or minimize: Don’t watch, read, shop, consume, hang out with, overachieve, ...

Give: Be extra generous with time, money, attention, invite others to enjoy together, ...

Ask God to change your heart and give shalom

Fasting is NOT what gives shalom

Shalom is from God

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts.

Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them,

and to our God, for he will freely pardon.” *Isaiah 55:6-7*

Jesus said: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” *Matthew 11:28*

Reflection Questions for later today or this week...

1. What is a good thing you wish you had, and this lack is taking your peace away?
2. What is a good thing that you do have, yet it is taking your peace away?
3. What tends to pull your heart away from God, and from trusting in God?
4. What would it look like to “fast for a season” from this thing? What is a small step you could take this week?
5. What does it look like for you to “seek the LORD while he may be found”? What steps could you take this week to seek Him more diligently?

Conversation Starters

Someone said that one form of addiction is looking to something to solve a problem which is actually making the problem worse. What is an example? Why do we do that?