

1. My title for this lesson is "No Satisfaction". Yes I picture an old man with a beard (how I picture Solomon) yelling out from a stage the Rolling Stones song with a band playing behind him. The point is Solomon is giving example after example in this text of the things in life that one can do with one's life that in the long run do not bring any satisfaction to their lives.
 - a) OK, too bad for him. I'm pretty satisfied with my life. Why should I care? To remind us that anything we do in life that is not God-centered is eventually a waste of time, or as the Stones put it, "No Satisfaction". In effect, this whole lesson is here to remind us what does and what does not bring us satisfaction to our lives. It mostly focuses on having wealth, but one can apply the lesson to any aspect of life that is not God centered.
 - b) If you think about most advertisement, it is telling us, "Are you satisfied with this part of your life?" The answer is usually no, which is why the advertising works. Who among us is completely satisfied with anything from our home to our sex life? The reality is no one can ever have enough of any material thing (without God) to completely satisfy us.
 - c) Well, what if I do have a God centered life? What if I do believe that Jesus is God? What is the purpose of studying this lesson? It's to make us think about how we are living out our lives and how we are using the time that God gives us to live. This lesson is far more than just asking, how God would view how we are living. It is about examining our lives and pondering about the long-term aspects of how we are living. What we do may satisfy us now, but what about the long-term consequences of how we choose to live?
 - d) In effect, this lesson is about how we want to be remembered after we die. What we do in our life affects those around us. The question is how much of an influence do we want to be to others, or are we only thinking about what is best for me?
2. With that convicting statement stated, let me summarize these two chapters.
 - a) First, Solomon spends a few verses talking about when we approach God, we have to be willing to listen to Him and not just blurt out every prayer request we have. The point is to appreciate the life God has given us and not just to desire more. Yes we have problems, but so does everyone. This is the only life we have so we must make the best of it.
 - b) Next comes a discussion about keeping one's vows to God. The section is similar to what Jesus Himself preached on keeping one's vows. The essential point is that God expects us to be men and women of our word. If we can't be trusted in whatever vows we make to God, how will others trust us when we make promises to them, or even simply tell them about God? The underlying point is that life will never be satisfying if we are not willing to keep our word both to God and to people.
 - c) Then most of Chapter 5 and all of Chapter 6 focused on the accumulation of wealth. As I read through this, I realized the issue is much bigger than how much "stuff" we have. The issue is about the lack of complete satisfaction one will never get from just spending one's entire focused on say the accumulation of wealth, power or fame. In the end, such things are vanity to again use the King James Version of the common term used in this book.
 - i) To state the obvious, if all that Solomon wanted to say, is don't waste one's life just focusing on acquiring these things, that don't satisfy us. Solomon requires a lot of verses in order to describe what a waste of a life that is.
 - d) My goal in this lesson is not to make us feel guilty about how we live, but to make all us see the most precious thing God gives us, our time from His perspective. The idea is to think about how we use our time and how much satisfaction can be drawn based on how we use that time. Therefore, it is time for Solomon to effectively start singing that song to us as we study how God wants us to use the time He has given us. With that said, we are ready to start reading through Chapters 5 and 6 of this book.

3. Chapter 5, Verse 1: Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. ² Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.
 - a) One thing to gather as one reads Ecclesiastes is that Solomon is no atheist. The purpose of this book is to understand the reasons for living and how one should use one's time. With that stated, Solomon spends a few verses contemplating how we should approach God.
 - b) Let me explain it another way: If one has ever worked in a corporate setting, a secretary will never enter a boss's office without bringing something to write upon. That assistant is expected to take notes of whatever the boss says. This leads me to Solomon's point that if we are approaching God we need to remember He may have something to say to us.
 - i) Does that mean we should take blank paper with us to church, or say, our favorite spot to go pray? If one looks around church during a sermon, you may see some taking notes as to remember what they have learned. My whole point is that if God has something to say to us, we have to be prepared to listen.
 - c) This concept leads back to these two verses. In the ancient Jewish rituals when people would approach God, they would bring an animal to sacrifice for forgiveness. Solomon's point is that way too many people think of going to church (or synagogue) as simply just performing a ritual and being on their way as if to think, "OK, I can check that off my list of things I have to do this week and go back to their business."
 - i) That is why Solomon is reminding us here of the simple fact that if God is God and we are mortal, why do we sometimes approach Him as a necessary ritual that we are obligated to perform? Why don't we approach God being willing to listen to Him as opposed to just speaking what is on our mind?
 - ii) To state the obvious, God is not obligated to speak to us on our timing. However if He does have something to say to us, I find He usually makes it obvious to us. My point is if we are so busy talking, we are not taking the time to listen. I have had to learn the hard way that God does His best speaking to me when I am not busy talking to Him. For example I often get ideas about what to write here while I'm lying in bed or not even thinking about these lessons.
 - iii) The simple point here is about having the willingness to listen to God and not just to blurt out whatever is our prayer request for the moment. Yes of course it is OK to tell God what is on our minds as that act reminds us that He is in charge as we are not. At the same time, we can't be so busy talking we don't take the time to listen.
 - d) Let me back up for a quick moment and talk about these verses in context of the last set of verses from the previous chapter. Remember that in the original text there are no chapter breaks. In the last set of verses, Solomon was discussing the fact that it is better to have friends and close companions than to go through life alone. Then he was comparing those willing to listen to God who had "nothing" with someone who was a king and had all the things that king could possibly want but refused to listen to anyone.
 - i) Now here in Chapter 5, Solomon is continuing to warn about the dangers of being alone. In Chapter 4, he talked about the dangers of a lack of friendships. Then he focused on the danger of the refusal to listen to others. Now here in Chapter 5, he is saying to be aware of the danger to not listen to God in one's life.
 - ii) Suppose one is to say, I've never heard God speak audibly to me. Why should I try to listen to Him and how do I do that? My response is "me too". It's not like one has to strain to hear Him. I've never held the view that God is a soft speaker and we have to strain to hear him. The point is we can be so busy just talking we don't take the time to listen to Him. Let's start with something easy. If we really believe the Bible is the word of God, are we taking the time to actually think about what it's saying or are we just reading or just listening to someone read it?

- iii) Now let's come back to actually listening to God. If we do accept the idea that He is in charge of our lives, do we make the time to be willing to listen to Him? It's not like we have to strain, but simply a willingness to listen. I have found that God makes His thoughts obvious to me, even though I've never actually audibly heard Him speak. It's more of a sense of this or that is the right thing for me to do at this moment in time. The difference between God speaking and instinct is that God's desire never ever violates His Word. What we may want to do at any given moment may or may not be His will for our lives. The key is just to keep moving, make the best decisions possible, spend daily time in His word and prayer, and to have a heart to be willing to listen if and when He has something to say to us.
 - e) Last thing on listening and trusting God and I'll move on: A fun experience is to go spend some time hanging around new believers. I've watched God do some of His best miracles to the lives of new believers. That is God's way of saying, "Come on, keep on trusting Me as I want to guide your life". After a while, those cute little coincidences don't happen as often as if God is saying to us, "Do you trust Me now, even when those cute little miracles are not happening as often?" My point is that God will often speak to us less often as we mature as believers as He is effectively saying, "Come on, keep on trusting Me." I'm still guiding your life whether you realize it or not or whether you think about it or not.
 - i) In conclusion, be willing to listen to God as we never know when He wants to communicate to us. Have that notepad ready when we do get an urge to do something that we may not have thought about a moment earlier.
- 4. Verse 3: As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.
 - a) Verse 3 continues the same thought, but remember this is Hebrew poetry. My point is it expresses different ideas compared and contrasted in similar thoughts.
 - i) The way this verse relates to the previous verses is most of us are aware that when we are really busy with a project, we discover that our dreams or even nightmares are often based on what we have just experienced prior to going to sleep.
 - ii) The poetic comparison is just as a time of lot of worries causes us to dream about those problems, so a person who doesn't care about his or her relationship with God does a lot of talking but not much listening to what God has to say to them.
 - iii) Let me explain it this way: Show me a person who can care less about what God thinks of their lives, and I'll show you a person who loves to talk, talk, and talk. Such a person doesn't care what others think, just shooting off their mouths.
 - b) The main point of these first few verses is about having the ability to listen. The secret of a good marriage is about putting the needs of one's partner first over our own needs. It is about being willing to listen to others and not just shooting off our own mouths. The same can be said about our relationship with God. We have to be willing to listen. To state the obvious again, God is not obligated to speak to us on our timing, but at the same time, we do have to be willing to listen and not just speak all the time.
 - c) Let me end this section with something I learned many years ago about listening. There is a technique taught in the business world called the "Jack in the Box" technique. When you go through a drive through restaurant, employees are trained to repeat back our order to make sure they got it right. It is making sure the client is heard correctly. That technique work wonders in the business world and even in our marriage relationships. It is a matter of showing one cares about someone by repeating back what they just said. It shows we are listening and care what one has to say. I never cease to be amazed to see how much my relationships with people improve when I mentally apply this simple method.
 - d) With that said, Solomon is now through talking about the importance of being willing to listen to others. Beginning in the next verse, the topic changes to our willingness to finish whatever commitments we have made to God. Then I'll explain how they connect.

5. Verse 4: When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. ⁵ It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. ⁶ Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? ⁷ Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.
- a) Before I even talk about these verses, let us remember what Jesus said on this same topic: "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one." (Matthew 5:33-37, NIV)
 - i) I put this quote here for two reasons: First and foremost, Jesus is basically giving the same advice as Solomon is here. Both are saying in effect if we make a vow to God, He expects us to keep it. Let's face it: what good is our word, if we have the reputation for not being men and women of our words?
 - ii) My second reason for quoting this is to show that even though Ecclesiastes isn't quoted in the Gospels there is Godly wisdom in this book. Jesus is sort of quoting from this passage when He comments on the importance of keeping one's word.
 - b) In effect, the topic of being in awe of God and not talking too much is still in play here. The point is instead of just blabbing off whatever is the first thing that pops in our head we have to be willing to listen to others. The same rule applies to making commitments or vows. To state the obvious some more, if we make some sort of vow, God expects us to fulfill what we promise as He expects us to be trustworthy in what we promise others.
 - c) Let me try a tough one here: What if we make a rash vow and can't fulfill it? What if we make a vow that we realize is impossible to repay? Then sincerely and honestly apologize to the person or to God about what one has vowed. Explain earnestly why we can't fulfill what we have committed. Coming back to the "Jack in the Box" method of repeating back what a person says, if that other person asks us to do something, we're not being forced to do it, but if we want to please that person, we do what they ask. That is the underlying tone of these verses both as spoken by Solomon and by Jesus.
 - d) Grant it, the focus here is on God and not on people. If we swear something like, "Dear God, get me out of this situation alive, then I promise to obey You or do what you ask". The point is God is listening and takes that type of commitment seriously. We forget at times like that we don't have to make a vow and God wants to help us just because He loves us. At the same time God takes vows seriously simply because He wants to be men and women of our word so that we can be trustworthy when we tell others about Him.
 - e) Notice the final line of this group of verses is to "stand in awe of God":
 - i) My loose translation: If you are going to believe in God, take Him seriously and take His judgment of our lives seriously. If we do that, we are not going to make any sort of vow and if we do God holds us accountable to that vow.
 - f) At this point Solomon stops lecturing us about the danger of a failure to keep our word to God and moves to a related topic of injustice in the world. The connection of the last set of verses with the next set is they are both describing injustice. A failure to keep our vows to God means that we are not men and women of our word. Just as injustice can be done to God by not keeping our vows, so injustice also happens in the world when those who are higher in power take advantage of those that are lower in power.
 - i) To put this concept another way, we are reading Hebrew poetry of connecting one type of action with another type of action. The first thought is the injustice when one fails to keep their promise to God. The second thought is injustice when one has power over another and takes advantage of that authoritative power.

6. Verse 8: If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. ⁹ The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.
 - a) To describe this, let me use an example most of us can relate to: Paying taxes. Ronald Reagan once made a comment to the effect of, "Taxes should not be deducted from one's pay check. Taxes should just be paid annually when they are due. That way we realize how much money the government is taking from them." I'm paraphrasing a little, but the point is throughout history taxes have existed, then and now. There is an old joke that the only things that are consistent in life are death and taxes.
 - b) OK then, what does that unfriendly reminder have to do with these verses? The simple point is people in power take advantage of those under them. Those of us who work hard to earn money must pay a percentage of it, to those who haven't earned it. Yes much of it is for a legitimate need, but there are also those who take advantage of those situations.
 - i) One can see in all of history government leaders regularly enjoying themselves at great expense, which is the expense of all of us paying our taxes.
 - c) Well John, that is reality. We can't change it, and such oppression by one group of people over another has existed throughout history. What do we do about it? Verse 10 reminds us of the fate of those taking advantage of others:
7. Verse 10: Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.
 - a) Remember that the key word of the entire book of Ecclesiastes is translated "meaningless" in the NIV and "vanity" in the King James Version. The point here is that whoever loves money is never satisfied with what they have and always want more. Remember that Solomon himself was one of the richest men who ever lived. If one reads about the lives of most billionaires, most of them are so focused on accomplishing their own goals, they are never satisfied with what they have and still want to accomplish more. The point is there is no enough "enough" in life. That is why Solomon is saying to live to chase after wealth is vanity, because wealth in itself never satisfies.
 - b) Time for a few disclaimers here. Does this mean there are no rich people in heaven? No. There are some who realize they have been blessed by God and they also realize they are given a special gift to build companies and build wealth. The world needs employers as well as employees in order to function. To be financially successful is not to sin. What is being discussed here is the idea of only caring about wealth, because in the end, that does not satisfy one's desire. There is no "I now have enough and I can stop worrying".
 - c) To illustrate this principal some more think about advertising. That always appeals to the idea that "enough is never enough". Like I said, An advertising slogan may say, "Are you happy with your car, house, (or fill in the blank)?" The point is there is always something more we desire and advertisers understand that enough is never enough.
 - d) This fact about there is never "enough" to satisfy our desires, leads us to Verse 11.
8. Verse 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?
 - a) What most people discover in life is if one's income increases, so do one's expenses. The point is one can see one's income go up and just as quickly as one gets that income, so do the places where that income is spent. But John, what about people who buy expensive homes, to use real estate as an example. What about the billionaires you described earlier that have so much money they can't spend it if they tried? As a general rule of thumb, the money we earn does go out as fast as it comes in. However, there are a few who do keep some in banks faster than they can spend it.
 - b) Solomon's point is in effect, what good is it? Sooner or later one is going to die and those who earn that much can't enjoy it other than some vacations because they are too focuses on trying to earn more than to just enjoy what they do have in life.

9. Verse 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.
 - a) All of this leads to Solomon's conclusion about wealth: Those who have work for a living sleep better than those who have great abundance.
 - b) At this point, let me stop to address my fellow insomniac's here.
 - i) There is many a night I wake up in the middle of the night and I admit I do some of my best work here when I can't sleep. I've learned to accept that there are times where God wants me awake in order to accomplish some goal. I've also accepted the idea that as one gets older one does not sleep as well.
 - ii) This leads me back to Solomon. He is not citing specific any example of himself or someone else he know, but just a rule of life he has acquired by his wisdom: That people who work for a living sleep better than those who have great abundance.
 - iii) Are there exceptions to the rule? Of course. I am one of them.
 - c) The main point is Solomon knew enough about people to realize that those who had great power and wealth did not sleep as well as every day "workers". How did Solomon know this? Probably from being a king and observing the lives of people around him.
 - d) Solomon also realized that diet was not a factor. That is why this verse says if one eats a little or much, it does not affect how a rich man sleeps. The issue is still about worrying. If a person has a lot of stuff, they are worried that it might be stolen or worried about how to manage what they have. Someone without a lot of stuff can sleep better because they don't have to worry about how they are going to manage all of that stuff.
 - e) OK John, I get all of that. How does that tie to the last set of verses and the lesson theme? The idea is that when we get our focus off of God and onto our stuff it causes problems that we didn't anticipate like a lack of sleep. But wouldn't a lack of a good night sleep be a good tradeoff to have an unlimited amount of stuff? Try it. Consider how happy one would be if one had all that money can buy, but one can never really enjoy life.
 - f) To put it another way, I am convinced some of the unhappiest people I have ever seen are those trying to find happiness at "happy hour" at a bar. They are trying to satisfy a desire for pleasure with alcohol and company and truthfully, it never satisfies. One is always left with a desire for more, just as a desire for more stuff or power or fame never fulfills. God created us with a need for Him and one can't fulfill that need with stuff or "happy hour".
 - g) That leads me back to a good night sleep. If one wants to end their day feeling satisfied and not having to worry about our lives, our first priority is to consider how we should be pleasing to God and if we give Him our problems, the good night sleep should happen.
 - h) Meanwhile, Solomon has a lot more to say about people and wealth:
10. Verse 13: I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner,¹⁴ or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him.
 - a) John's loose translation: Solomon has seen people get rich, and then either through some sort of bad investment or bad luck, that person loses everything and can't pass on any sort of inheritance to his or her children.
 - b) OK, so some people have bad luck. What's the point? The point is that if all that we care about is making money then we are truly wasting our lives. We may have it, or we may lose it. Again, it comes back to the danger of not living a God centered life.
11. Verse 15: Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand.
 - a) This verse is our reminder about how we should consider our financial blessings.
 - b) Let me give a good example here. Many years ago I heard a story of a wonderful gospel singer who literally had to escape for his life as his house was burned to the ground. Yes he suffered a bad loss and it took a long time for him to financially recover. His attitude about the loss was "It wasn't mine in the first place". This is the concept that all that we have belongs to God can give one comfort through the worst of financial tragedies.

12. Verse 16: This too is a grievous evil: As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind? ¹⁷ All his days he eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger. ¹⁸ Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him--for this is his lot.
- a) Solomon isn't through discussing life with a lot of wealth. Before I discuss these verses, we need to keep in mind again, that Solomon was one of the richest men that ever lived. Therefore, he spoke from personal experience what life was like to have unlimited wealth. In effect this is Solomon near the end of his life saying, "Been there, done that, and let me tell you what are the consequences of living with all of that wealth."
 - b) Solomon is coming to his conclusion about life with or without wealth. To understand these verses, let us start with the phrase "grievous evil". When we think of a really evil deed, we may think of murder or mass murder. Solomon is saying a really bad evil is to live only to acquire lots of stuff (or even power or fame).
 - i) Solomon's point is that wealth itself is not satisfying. It always leaves one craving more. To have a great amount of wealth simply means one cannot enjoy it as one is always worried about losing it or controlling it. That is why he said earlier that people with great wealth don't sleep as well as an average working person.
 - c) It would help here to stand back and remember the purpose of Solomon writing this. He had great wealth, but didn't have any satisfaction from it. The purpose of this book is to help us understand what is the purpose of living and what things we do can and cannot do to bring satisfaction to our lives. The idea is that a person who only lives to acquire a lot of things and never cares about pleasing God will only end up frustrated about life.
 - i) I can't tell you how many quote unquote "successful people" have made public statements that they will be happy if they only had a little more success or power or fame. They think more of what they have will make them happy. It appears that few of them ever take Solomon's advice of just enjoying what they have.
 - ii) So are you saying it is better to be poor than to be rich? As I recently heard some one say, it is better to have money than to have none, as I've been in both places in my life. At the same time, it is a matter of keeping in mind that today could be the last day of our lives. If we don't stop to appreciate what it is we do have in life, we have wasted all the effort we make to accumulate what we do have. That in effect, is Solomon's point in these verses.
13. Verse 19: Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work--this is a gift of God. ²⁰ He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.
- a) Like I have said throughout this study, Solomon is no atheist. His point here is that when someone lives a God centered life and that person still accomplishes what allows him to have some wealth, then one can have a satisfying life, because that person realizes that one is blessed by a relationship with God and not just based on one's efforts.
 - b) Let me paraphrase Verse 20: A godly man or woman doesn't take the time to worry about whether or not they will lose their wealth because God keeps that person satisfied in life by keeping their (our) focus on Him and not on their stuff. To say it another way, if one has some wealth, one can have satisfaction in this life by keeping one's focus centered on God and not upon what one has acquired in life.
 - c) Are you saying one should never plan about one's financial future? Of course not. My wife and I both make plans and we have made out a will in case something ever happens to us so our children are taken care of. The issue is not about making the right decisions about one's life or doing the best we can with what we have. The issue is about living a God centered life as that is the only way one can truly appreciate whatever wealth we have acquired in our lives, be it a little or a lot.

- d) You would think the happy comment at the end of Chapter 5 would wrap up Solomon's talk about money and life. However, Solomon is not through yet dealing with the issue of satisfaction and wealth. In fact, Solomon has twelve more verses, essentially on the same topic and that is Chapter 6.
 - e) Before we get into all of this, some positive news. There is a happy ending to this book. We have a few more chapters to go before we get there. What Solomon is trying to pound into all our heads is what a waste of an effort anything is without living a God centered life. Solomon is not just saying that based on say, advice his father gave him. Solomon is saying this based on a lot of wasted years chasing after the things as described here in this book. For example, when Solomon says one shouldn't waste one's life trying to acquire as much wealth as possible, he is a man speaking from experience in that field. When he says that one ends up alone and miserable from just living for wealth, he knows it from his life.
 - i) To use a popular expression again, "Been there, done that" or maybe, "Don't waste your life with the mistakes that I have made in my life". That is the no satisfaction in this world tone that is a key part of this letter and these chapters in particular.
 - ii) With that said we are now ready for Verse 1 of Chapter 6.
14. Chapter 6, Verse 1: I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men: ² God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.
- a) John's loose translation: Take a person that doesn't care about God. Give him or her great wealth, stuff, and fame so that he or she lacks nothing that can be acquired in this world. Then, that person won't be able to enjoy what they have as they realize that there is no satisfaction in those things. They think having harder and longer in order to get any sort of satisfaction out of life. Such a person is so driven to acquire more of what they think they have, they can't take the time to appreciate what it is they do have in life.
 - i) This verse is not saying God gives all ungodly people all of this stuff. He is also not saying that all wealthy or famous ignore God. The point is that one can have all of these things and still ignore the entity (God) who has blessed their lives. To have these things and ignore God is a waste of the talents and assets one has.
 - b) There is a modern song line that goes, "the rich man wants to be king and the king is not satisfied until he rules everything". (Bruce Springsteen). To say it another way, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Both lines are making the same point that one can never be satisfied with what one can acquire or achieve in this lifetime. The only way to have satisfaction is to live a God centered life. I'm sure Solomon is saying this based on observing his own life and the lives of other leaders he has met.
 - c) The verse says that strangers enjoy them. What does that refer to? It refers to children or even household servants that benefit from the wealth they didn't acquire. That just means others get to enjoy whatever wealth or fame one has because the person who is acquiring that stuff is too busy trying to get more of it or maintaining what one has.
 - d) I have a younger brother who is an accountant that specializes in working with those who have inherited a lot of wealth from their parents. Such people often don't have to work all of their lives. Many of them waste their lives and a few use it for charities to try to make the world a better place. My brother's job is in effect to say, "here is how much taxes you owe based on the interest of your savings or based on an inheritance tax". My point is the same as Solomon's: "strangers" get to enjoy (or waste) from the efforts of others.
 - e) So if one's children get to enjoy the benefits of our hard work, how is that a "grievous evil" as Solomon calls it at the end of Verse 2? Leaving an inheritance to our children is not the evil. The point is if one is living a life ignoring God in order to acquire those things, even though our children may benefit from it, we have wasted a life when we don't bring glory to God but what we have accomplished. That is the "no satisfaction" of life.

15. Verse 3: A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. ⁴ It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. ⁵ Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man-- ⁶ even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?
- a) Solomon is using exaggeration to make his point. To paraphrase, a man may have 100 children (Verse 3) and live a thousand or two thousand years (Verse 6), but still not have any sense of satisfaction out of this life. One has to remember that in that culture, to have lots of children was a sign that one is successful. In a culture based on agriculture, having many children also means one has a lot of people available to help run the farm.
 - b) Now suppose this 2,000 year old man (yes I'm thinking of Mel Brooks here) had so much wealth, that all of his hundreds of sons and daughters each had more than enough to live on and they didn't have to work. It is like the families that my brother works with. What becomes their purpose in life? If they never have to work, how do they make a difference in this world? For what it is worth, I did know a wonderful woman who's father was very successful. That daughter used her life for charity projects that glorified God by her work. Can't one argue that the works of that one man or woman was successful if their offspring used their wealth to make a difference in the world?
 - i) The issue here is not the children, but the one living to acquire all of that wealth. That person may say, "Look how my son or daughter is using my wealth in order to make a difference in the world", but the glory goes to the children, not the man or woman who has spent their lifetime acquiring all of that stuff.
 - ii) The point is one cannot appreciate life living like that. That is why Solomon says that it is better to be a stillborn child than to live that type of life.
 - iii) A "stillborn" is a baby that accidentally dies at birth. There is a Jewish tradition to not name a baby until after they are born. The idea is one gets less attached to a child with no name and it eases the pain of a baby dying at birth. Personally, after watching a few of those deaths, I have learned the family still lives with that pain all of their lives. My grandmother gave birth to triplets that all died at birth. To her dying day she would mention that fact every now and then and not let it go.
 - iv) Sorry, got off topic here. The main point here is that to just live one's life in order to accomplish as much fortune or fame as possible, does not satisfy. Even if one gets to see one's children enjoying what one has accomplished, one doesn't get any satisfaction oneself out of that wealth (or fame) because one is so focused either on maintaining what one has or trying to more, there is no satisfaction to it.
 - c) I was thinking about my own father as an example. He was fairly successful in life, but he also took the time to enjoy it. He loves to travel and spend time with us. My father is not the type of person Solomon is describing here. Solomon is focusing on the type of person who is so obsessed with acquiring wealth or fame they never live a God centered life and never take the time to appreciate what they have. That is the point here.
 - d) Let me return to Verse 3 for a moment. In Solomon's made up illustration, he says that a person who lives to only acquire more wealth never has a proper burial. The idea is not that they aren't buried or don't have a funeral. The idea is that they don't get any honor at their funeral, because they only used their lives to enrich themselves and not help any one but themselves.
 - i) There is an old joke about a mobster who asks a priest to give a nice eulogy for his brother who was also a mobster. Since the priest could not think of one nice thing to say, the funeral line, was "This man wasted his life with bad living. However, compared to his (still living) brother, this man was a saint". The point of that joke is the same as Verse 3. A wasted life ends with a funeral with nothing good said.

- e) Let me wrap this up with a little more discussion about the comparison of a stillborn baby to a person who has wasted their life only trying to acquire things for themselves. Here, Solomon goes on for a few verses saying in effect the stillborn baby had a wasted life because that baby never had the opportunity to appreciate life. Yet Solomon is saying that the newborn, dead baby in effect had a better life than the person who wasted it.
 - i) I could easily deviate here to discuss the aspects of heaven and innocent children. Sometimes I get asked, "Do you believe there will be non-Christians in heaven?" I like to respond with, "What about all the babies that die at birth?" How will God be fair to them? That is why I believe that trusting in Jesus is necessary for one's salvation for one who has been exposed to that knowledge at an age where one gets it. I'm also convinced there will be lots of people in heaven who never heard of Jesus because they died at an age before they were accountable for their actions. This a point Paul made in 1st Corinthians 13:11.
 - ii) Remember that Solomon had an older brother that died at birth. That was the first child produced by David and Bathsheba. When that baby died, David announced he would see that child again in heaven after David died. (See 2nd Samuel 12:22.)
 - iii) With that statement out of my system, let me talk about how a stillborn has better than a life than one who doesn't honor God? That is because that stillborn is saved because they didn't waste their lives just to acquire wealth and fame. That is why the baby that dies at birth is better off eternally than a person who ignores God all of their lives. That baby is saved, that wasted full life is not. That's the point here.
 - f) Meanwhile, Solomon has a few more things to say about people who waste their lives only trying to acquire more stuff:
16. Verse 7: All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.
- a) John's loose translation: The person who only lives to acquire more stuff or more fame for themselves, is never going to be satisfied, so their life is wasted.
 - b) Remember that Solomon is not talking about all people. He is only focusing on those who only use their lives to enrich themselves and no one else. That is the "no satisfaction" that these two chapters are focusing upon. When Solomon says, "his appetite", he is not being literal about being hungry for food. The point is about appetite for acquiring things.
17. Verse 8: What advantage has a wise man over a fool? What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others?
- a) Solomon's point is that having the "wisdom of the world" is not the secret to happiness.
 - b) The point about the poor person is that if one has wisdom, but never has any material possessions whatsoever, what is the point of having Godly wisdom, if one never knows how to use it and enjoy life? If one is so poor, one has to beg from others to live one's life, what good is having the wisdom to know how to enjoy life if one has nothing.
 - c) I was thinking about those people who live as monks. They live a very simple life and don't have a lot of stuff. Still, those monks do some basic things in order to acquire what they needed to live. They may grow their own food or trade goods to acquire what they need. What about priests and pastors? They are dependent upon their study of God's word to teach others how to live Godly lives. They are dependant upon the generosity of their patrons to keep on living with that lifestyle. My point is some can have barely any wealth and still have wisdom. Solomon is not condemning that type of person.
 - d) The point again, is the issue of satisfaction. If one has the wisdom to know how to act in the presence of other people, but is so poor, that one has to focus one's life on begging or figuring out how they are going to live, what good is having that wisdom? Yesterday, I was giving my oldest daughter an education on "beggars". I explained that some are just mentally ill and don't know how to act any better. Some are drug addicts and are doing what they can to support their habits. Some are just out of work and don't know what else to do. The point is one can be wise and poor, but then what good is that wisdom?

18. Verse 9: Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.
 - a) Time for another "loose translation": It is better to enjoy what one does have, then to just sit around dreaming about one does not have. To worry about what one does not own is also a type of vanity that Solomon focuses upon.
 - b) So is Solomon saying we should not dream of say, being successful? Of course not. This is more about being so focused on what we don't have that we don't take the time to enjoy the things that God has already given us in our life. Again, we cannot be satisfied in life by having enough "stuff" so more doesn't help. Solomon and I have beaten that point to death throughout this lesson and that is Solomon's point here in this verse. He is saying what a waste of a life it is to constantly worry about what one does not have. We need to take the time to appreciate what we do have as there is always the possibility we may not live to see another day. That is the underlying tone here.
19. Verse 10: Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known; no man can contend with one who is stronger than he.
 - a) In effect, Solomon is coming back to thinking about God here. I happen to like the New Living paraphrase of this verse that says, "Everything has already been decided. It was known long ago what each person would be. So there's no use arguing with God about your destiny." The point here is that God exists, He knows all things and He knows the fate of all people we can't change what He already knows.
 - b) OK, so God knows my destiny. I don't and neither do you. Does that mean we just sit around and feel sorry for ourselves? Of course not. The issue here is to realize what a waste of a life and a lack of satisfaction comes from living from things that will have no eternal consequences. That is the point Solomon has been trying to beat over our heads throughout this book. He is saying, "God is in charge, realize that, and live one's life by that principal and accept the fact He is in charge of one's life, period."
20. Verse 11: The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?
 - a) In effect, we have come full circle from where this lesson started. In the first few verses of Chapter 5, it talked about the importance of being willing to listened to God and not just say whatever is on our minds at the moment. Here Solomon is saying again, "if all we do is talk, talk and talk, there is no satisfaction to that, and one is wasting one's life."
 - b) What I have discovered as a big part of this ministry is not just to write and ignore what people think about what I say. I love to respond to questions and help people to grow in God's word. I believe that is what God has called me to do here. My point is I never want to be thought of as someone who just writes, writes and writes and never listens to what anyone says in response to this writing. If I ignore responses, then this writing too will be as meaningless as someone who just talks all the time.
 - c) The point is we need to be willing to listen. That includes listening to God and it definitely includes listening to others around us. That is why I explained in this lesson the "Jack in the Box" technique of repeating back what others have said so they know we hear them.
 - d) OK, I've beaten that point to death. Time for the last verse.
21. Verse 12: For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?
 - a) Since I've quoted pop stars in this lesson, I figured I would end it with one more: Jimmy Buffet once wrote, "And still twenty four hours may be sixty good years It's still not that long a stay." The point here is that life is short and one has to appreciate it while one can.
 - b) The final point is we don't know what is going to happen to this world or us after we are dead. Yes, I believe if we are saved we can watch what happens from "heaven's balcony", but we can't interact with this world as humans once are time is up.
 - c) Solomon is ending this section with "enjoy life while you can. It is the only one you get." More stuff won't help. Doing God's will is the secret to get the most out of this life.

22. Let me wrap up this lesson of "pop culture slogans" by reminding us what is and is not important in life. Since life is short and we don't know the amount of time we have to live, remember that the greatest purpose one can use their life for is to make a difference for God in this world.
- a) The "how" is between God and yourself and I can't guide any of us with specific's. I just know that living any sort of life without it being a God centered life, does lead to a life of "no satisfaction" and that is the point that Solomon has been beating home through out these two chapters. Now that I've made us all feel guilty about how we have lived out our lives to date, the good news is that it is never too late to change. God likes to say to us, "Let the past go. Let me guide you from this point forward. Trust Me and let Me lead you to a life that will make a difference for Me in this world. Trust that I want to use your life for My glory and let Me lead You. I will give you "specifics" on my timing. Until then just keep on praying, being guided by My word, go be with other believers and make the best decisions possible knowing that I am guiding your life." In Jesus name, amen.
 - b) That is my ending prayer for this lesson. Thanks for reading, John.