

Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:11

Two key words in Ecclesiastes – **gain** and **gift**

1:3 “What do people **gain** from all their labours at which they toil under the sun?”

Questions:

What do you want out of life?

What will it take to be happy?

Teacher trying to find what it will take –
work/wisdom/wellbeing/pleasure/wealth

In the end, he decides, time and death will take it all – and he seems to despair.

Chapter 4 – work without God in the picture – envy, overwork, underwork, loneliness

In this section – he is looking again at wealth and honour and our ability and inability to enjoy what God has given us.

He surveys these issues and he finds the following:

1) **People that build their life around wealth never have enough**

“People will never [...] stop wanting more than they have.”

(Proverbs 27:20 NCV)

“Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless.” (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

6:7 “Everyone’s toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied.”

And money just seems to evaporate on us surprisingly quickly

5:11 "As goods increase, so do those who consume them"

Huey Lewis – "And the money goes so fast it ain't funny"

How much is enough?

When are we rich enough?

~ After the church service, a little boy told the pastor – "when I grow up I'm going to give you some money". "Well thank you" replied the pastor, "but why"?

"Because my daddy says you're one of the poorest preachers we have ever had."

~ List of book titles at book store

"How to get rich"

"I can make you rich"

"The science of getting rich"

"Think and grow rich"

Where do you think the line is? When are you officially rich? Where is the line and when do you know that you have crossed it?

Who and what is rich?

What is enough?

The thing is this: rich is a moving target:

~ Gallup survey:

Asked those earning £15,000 or less what they would need to earn to feel rich
- £40,000

Ask those who are earning £40,000 a year if they feel rich, they will probably tell you not.

In fact, Gallup asked those earning £50,000 a year what they would need to earn to feel rich, and they said £100,000 per year.

You ask those on higher earnings, and by the time they have paid the mortgage and the tax and the insurance and the school fees and so on, they don't **feel** rich.

In fact, Gallup asked top-end earners, what they would need to feel rich, and they averaged out at £2.5 million a year. So, if you are only on a million a year, you wouldn't really feel all that rich.

"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.**"
(Ecclesiastes 5:19 NIV)

Comparatively speaking – you are rich. You may not feel wealthy enough to give, but you're probably wealthier than you think. If you earn the median UK salary (£32k in some regions), you are in the top 2% of the global income distribution. What's more, [since humans have existed] ... the world has never been wealthier. Believe it or not, you may be one of the richest people who has ever lived.

Gallup World Happiness Report 2025

~ Acknowledge divorce, bills, single parents etc.

~ Car – 3% of the world's population own a car. Some people are so rich they own a car. Some have two – one and another one.

And some people, imagine this, build houses for their cars, to protect them from the elements. When many people do not even have a roof over their heads. And some people have double garages – one for their car and one for their junk.

~ Wardrobes – walk-in – one for man, one for woman

Two-storey wardrobes – I've got nothing to wear.

~ £1 coin – throw away

Over 3 billion people (1 in 2 people) will work all day to earn less than £1.

For the price of a cup of coffee at Starbucks – some people will work 3 days.

You are rich.

We don't feel rich because:

- We compare – and others have more than us (4:4)
- We feel guilty
- We always want more (5:10)
- The more we have, the more we worry / the more responsibilities we have (5:12)

5:12 "The sleep of a labourer is sweet, whether they eat little or much, but as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep."

Don't feel guilty – feel grateful!

Gift not gain.

"God has blessed me with more than I need – I am rich."

Jesus had an encounter one day with a rich young man.

Said to him: "Leave your stuff and follow me."

"This was the last thing the official expected to hear. He was very rich and became terribly sad. He was holding on tight to a lot of things and not about to let them go."

(Luke 18:23 TM)

"Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

(Luke 18:24-25 NIV)

Do you ever read the bible and think that God is talking to someone else – but not you. Oh yes, it's hard for rich people to enter the kingdom of God. Those rich people.

When God is talking about rich people he is talking about us!

Yet many of us continue to live lives that are always grasping – for the next new thing, for more, for better.

St Augustine: “The **love of** worldly possessions entangles the soul and prevents it from flying to God.”

Many people are materially rich – and spiritually bankrupt.

2) Some people have a lot, yet are unable to enjoy what they have

6:1-2 “I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind: 2 God gives some people wealth, possessions and honour, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.”

Some people measure everything in material terms. Heaven measures things differently – and we must hold tightly to the right things, and hold loosely to everything else.

3) Ecclesiastes makes it quite clear that we will not take any of this stuff with us when we die.

5:13-16

“I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners, or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when they have children there is nothing left for them to inherit. Everyone comes naked from their mother's womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. They take nothing from their toil that they can carry in their hands. This too is a grievous

evil: As everyone comes, so they depart, and what do they gain, since they toil for the wind?"

Someone asked the accountant of the very rich John D Rockefeller how much he left when he died.

"All of it" his accountant replied.

Some of you – your circumstances have changed, and you feel much less well off. It doesn't feel good. God does not measure your value in your job or your marital status or the size of your house.

~ The richest man in Denbireshire will die tonight at midnight.

Some people who appear so rich are spiritually so poor.

Some people who seem less well-off are exceedingly rich in the eyes of heaven.

God save us from a pursuit of things and of this world – and enable us to be truly passionate about him and his kingdom. To take the resources that he has made available to us and to invest them in his kingdom.

To enjoy them as gift rather than strive for them as gain.

Paul to Timothy:

"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to **put their hope in wealth**, which is so **uncertain**, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our **enjoyment**. Command them to **do good**, to **be rich in good deeds**, and to **be generous** and **willing to share**. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."

(1 Timothy 6:17-19 NIV)

Do good

Be rich in good deeds

Be generous

Be willing to share

Gift and gain.

Whatever we have in this life is a gift from God to be enjoyed and shared with others.

God is a loving father who loves to give good gifts to us.

The greatest of which is his son.

John 3:16

For God so loved ...that he gave

Will you spend your life trying to gain things that you will ultimately lose through time and death.

Or will you accept the gifts of God and eternal life with it.

Rich Mullins:

"Save me from those things that might distract me, please take them away and purify my heart, **I don't want to lose the eternal for the things that are passing**, "cause what will I have when the world is gone, if it isn't for the love that goes on and on, with my one thing, you're my one thing..."

"What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul."
(Matthew 16:26)

All our pieces of gold are but current to the grave; none of them will pass in the future world. Therefore, as merchants when they travel make over their monies here, to receive them by bills of exchange in another country; let us do good with our goods while we live, that when we die, by a blessed bill of exchange, we may receive them again in the Kingdom of heaven (Luke

16:9). To part with what we cannot keep, that we may get that we cannot lose, is a good bargain. Wealth can do us no good, unless it help us toward heaven. **Thomas Adams**

“He is no fool who gives away what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”

That quote is universally associated today with the name **Jim Elliot**, one of five American missionaries who were martyred in South America in the 1950s. He had indeed written them in his journal, and they convey a profound truth. But they did not originate with Elliot. Almost those precise words were spoken and written centuries earlier.

To find the original we must go back almost 300 years, to the mid-1600s, to the life of Philip Henry (1631-1696), father of Matthew Henry (1662-1714), the famous Bible commentator. In Matthew Henry's biographical account of his father's life, he notes his father's practice while pastor in Worthenbury, England (1658-1662) to set aside a tenth of his income for charitable purposes, notably the relief of the poor. Matthew then states regarding his father,

To encourage himself and others to works of charity, he would say—“He is no fool who parts with that which he cannot keep, when he is sure to be recompensed with that which he cannot lose.”

The apostle Paul:

Philippians 4:10-13

10 I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for **I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.** 12 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. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

1 Timothy 6:6-10

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Paul goes on in verses 11 onwards

Enjoy the things of this life that God has given you – they are gift. But you can't and won't keep them. Time and death will make sure of that.

Equally we know that we have eternal life – that we can never lose.

For me to live is Christ – to die is gain.

Community group questions and discussion points:

1. What do you believe will finally make you happy or fulfilled in life?

- How has that belief influenced your decisions and priorities?
 - How does Ecclesiastes challenge or affirm that perspective?
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2. According to Ecclesiastes 5:10, why is the love of money described as "meaningless"?

- Have you ever experienced dissatisfaction even after achieving something you thought would bring contentment?
 - How can we guard against that kind of endless pursuit?
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3. How do you define "rich"?

- How does your definition compare with the world's definition? With God's?
 - Do you consider yourself rich in light of global or biblical standards?
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4. Read Ecclesiastes 5:19. What does it mean to enjoy wealth and work as a gift from God rather than a personal gain?

- How does this mindset change your attitude toward your job, possessions, or lifestyle?
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5. According to Ecclesiastes 6:1–2, why might someone have great wealth but still not enjoy it?

- What are some reasons people struggle to enjoy what they have?
 - Are there areas of your life where you are unable to enjoy God's blessings?
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6. Ecclesiastes 5:15 says, "Everyone comes naked from their mother's womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart."

- What does this verse teach us about our possessions and priorities?

- How can you live with an eternal mindset in a world obsessed with accumulation?
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7. Do you struggle more with comparison, guilt, or discontentment when it comes to your financial situation?

- How does Ecclesiastes 5:12 speak into that struggle?
 - What practices could help you grow in gratitude and contentment?
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8. Reflect on 1 Timothy 6:17–19. What does it mean to be “rich in good deeds”?

- How might generosity be a form of investing in eternity?
 - In what ways could you be more generous with your time, money, or gifts?
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9. Jesus told the rich young ruler to “leave your stuff and follow me” (Luke 18:22).

- If Jesus asked you to surrender something valuable for Him, what would be the hardest thing to let go of?
 - What might He be calling you to release or give away today?
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10. Ecclesiastes and Paul both speak of contentment (Philippians 4:11–13, 1 Timothy 6:6–10).

- What does “godliness with contentment” look like in your life right now?
- How can you reorient your heart to pursue Christ as your “one thing”?