

Ecc06 – Approaching God – Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Pastor Dave Shepardson

In our last message in Ecclesiastes we started a section that includes some of the most applicable “real-life lessons” in the book.

Last week, we got counsel from Solomon on how to approach relationships. This week, we’ll get counsel from Solomon on how to approach God. Next week, we’ll get counsel on one more critical area in this life “under the sun”.

One thing for sure, we need some “real-life lessons” and the way I see it, there are basically two ways for us to learn our own “real-life lessons”. We can wither learn them by *experience* or we can learn them by *acquiring wisdom*. Learning by experience often comes with *some* amount of *regret and remorse*.

Learning by experience usually means we live our life doing what comes natural and doing what we think is best, and then when we get “down the road” we often look back with some level of regret and remorse and say, “*Now I have learned by experience.*” And then we try to find someone to share our “hard-learned” lessons with because it’s often *too late* for us to really *do anything* with these lessons we’ve learned “*by experience*”.

Learning by acquiring wisdom is the other way to learn your life-lessons. This means acquiring wisdom from someone else’s experience while we are still young enough to *do something* with the lessons. Solomon is trying to get us to learn this second way. The *wisest* and *wealthiest* man who ever lived is trying to give us the life-lessons he learned by experience – *the hard way*, including with more than a little regret and remorse and he’s hoping *we* acquire wisdom from *his* hard-life experience.

The wisest man who ever lived is screaming at us –
I’ve BEEN there
I’ve SEEN it all
I’ve EXPERIENCED it all – and I’ve ACHIEVED it all
and *you* can acquire wisdom *for your life* by *learning from my mistakes*.

Now *that* is a great reason to continue to pay close attention to this book, right?

Let’s pray. *Lord Jesus, would you light this on fire in us. We need real-life, rubber meets the road, day in day out lessons from your Word. We thank you Lord for the inheritance that is reserved for us in heaven. We thank you for your hand upon us and your assurances of our eternity. But Lord, you put – in the middle of your Word – lessons for this life under the sun. And we pray that we would learn them well, that we would learn*

them from Solomon's mistakes not from our own. That we would learn them by gaining wisdom from Solomon. We pray you would do that today as you apply this very specific Word to our hearts, Lord. We say Lord, we are here to listen, to obey, to hear from you. And so, we pray, Lord, speak to our hearts. In your name Jesus, amen.

Today's "real-life lesson" from Solomon is how to approach God in this life "under the sun". Let me ask you a question. Do you think there's a chance that *how we approach God* and *how we approach our relationship with God* has possibly swung a bit too far to the casual side of the pendulum? Maybe in our attempts to make God our *friend* – or even our genie – maybe we've lost some of the reverence and awe that the Bible says we should have toward the *Almighty Creator* and *Holy Judge* of the universe?

Is there a chance we've gone *too far* into *casually expecting* things from God and *is there a chance* we might be coming "too casually" into God's house and into God's presence? Now, that doesn't mean we can't come to God *just as we are* and *right where we are* in life. I'm not talking about us being able to come to God *all messed up* and *full of sin* and full of our own *confusion and questions*. God wants us to come to him *in* all that stuff and *with* all that stuff.

But I'm asking, do we approach God flippantly – casually? Do we come seeking our own will instead of seeking his perfect will?

This is what Solomon wants to focus on today and he starts with *how* we enter the "house of God" or *how* we enter "God's presence".

Ecclesiastes 5:1 (NLT)

1 As you enter the house of God, keep your ears open and your mouth shut. It is evil to make mindless offerings to God.

When Solomon says "the house of God" he's referring to the *temple* (that *he built* for God). The temple is where the *presence* of God *dwelt with man*. But now, the house of God where the presence of God dwells with man is God's *living temple* – which is the *gathering* of all those who belong to God as believers.

1 Peter 2:5 (NLT)

5 And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple . . .

So, as you enter the "house of God" *meaning* the assembly of God's people where the presence of God dwells, here is Solomon's counsel – *keep your ears open and your*

mouth shut. And you might say, well, that’s a little offensive and I would say... most good lessons are a little offensive.

Solomon says, when you approach God in his house, come ready to listen and not so much to speak. The Hebrew word for listening is a little bit like our double meaning word “to listen”. It means “TO HEAR AND OBEY”. It’s actually a single movement, meaning “to hear in order to obey”. When you come into the house of God you come in saying not – “I’ve got a few things I need to talk to somebody about.” You don’t come in with an agenda. You come in saying, “Lord, I need to hear from you and obey you today. I’m coming to rest in your presence with my heart open and a desire to hear what you have to say so that I can be transformed, so that I can change something in my life and *obey you.*”

But we often have a hard time being more committed to listening than speaking, *don’t we?* We have an *opinion* – We have *need* – We have our *rights* – and We want to be *heard*. And Solomon says in **Ecclesiastes 5:1 (NLT) 1** (whatever . . .) ***As you enter the house of God, keep your ears open and your mouth shut.***

The ESV says,

Ecclesiastes 5:1 (ESV)

1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God . . .

Maybe you had a parent in your childhood who used to say, “Watch your step, pal, you’re skating on thin ice.” Well, Solomon is saying when you come to approach God, *in his house* “***You want to Watch Your Step, because you may be skating on Thin Ice***”.

When we treat God “*Like One of Us*”
When we cut him down to “*OUR-Size*”
When we reduce God to “*OUR Understanding*”

When we treat God
Like he is NOT in Control
Or NOT Loving
Or NOT the Sovereign God of the Universe . . .

Solomon says - We need to “*Watch our Step*”

And the end of verse 1 explains *why*... It’s because (verse 1b) ... ***It is evil to make mindless offerings to God.***

The ESV calls these “Mindless Offerings” the “Sacrifice of Fools”. These “Mindless Offerings” are just *ramblings to God* without really considering *who it is* you are talking to – or *what it is* you are actually saying.

And when we do decide to talk, we need to be careful with what we say.

Ecclesiastes 5:2 (NLT)

2 Don't make rash promises (ESV – ‘don't be rash with your mouth’), and don't be hasty in bringing matters before God. After all, God is in heaven, and you are here on earth. So let your words be few.

The Christian Standard Bible does a great job here.

Ecclesiastes 5:2 (CSB)

2 Do not be hasty to speak, and do not be impulsive to make a speech before God (I love that). God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.

David Jeremiah comments here: *When speaking to God, we must always keep in mind that we are speaking from a basis of ignorance.*

If you want to know how God *feels* about us trying to *approach him* on his level – as his peer... read Job Chapters 38-42 where God begins a series of 70 questions designed to highlight Job's ignorance about all things *God*. Let me read a few verses out of just the first Chapter of God's questions to Job.

Job 38 (NLT)

1 Then the Lord answered Job from the whirlwind: . . .

3 Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.

4 “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much.

5 Who determined its dimensions . . .

6 What supports its foundations . . .

12 “Have you ever commanded the morning to appear . . .

13 Have you made daylight spread to the ends of the earth . . .

17 Do you know where the gates of death are located? . . .

18 Do you realize the extent of the earth? Tell me about it if you know!

19 “Where does light come from, and where does darkness go?

21 But of course you know all this! For you were born before it was all created, and you are so very experienced!

*24 Where is the path to the source of light? Where is the home of the east wind?
31 “Can you direct the movement of the stars . . .
32 Can you direct the constellations through the seasons . . .
33 Do you know the laws of the universe? Can you use them to regulate the earth?*

Then – at the end of the 70 questions we read in Job 40:1-2,

Job 40:1–2 (NLT)

1 Then the Lord said to Job,

2 “Do you still want to argue with the Almighty? You are God’s critic, but do you have the answers?”

Guys, before we start “finger-wagging” and “tongue-wagging” at God we need to remind ourselves that we are speaking from a *basis of ignorance*. And so, we humbly say, *Lord, you are God in Heaven. You are the Awesome, Supreme, Loving, and Just God of the Universe and I am here on earth, standing in my TOTAL IGNORANCE of your great plans and purposes.*

And so, Lord – I will POUR OUT my heart to you. I will come to you with ALL that I’m Feeling. But – in the End – I will always Remember and I will Always be Thankful that YOU are God in Heaven - and I AM HERE, on earth -So I will let my Words be Few and I will always Stand in AWE of You.

That is how we must approach God.

Then, in verse 3 Solomon again applies the “fool” nametag – *if it fits*

Ecclesiastes 5:3 says (NLT)

3 Too much activity gives you restless dreams; too many words make you a fool.

Solomon says – slow down and settle down. He’s talking about reckless speech toward God. He’s talking about rambling on to God *without thinking first* about what you’re saying.

The NET Bible helps us get the picture.

Ecclesiastes 5:3 (NET)

3 Just as dreams come when there are many cares, so the rash vow of a fool occurs when there are many words.

Speaking to God or making some sort of vow to him *without* really *thinking through* what you are doing may qualify you for the “fool” nametag.

Then in verse 4 is strong encouragement about what to do *when we do* make a vow or promise to God.

Ecclesiastes 5:4 (NLT)

4 When you make a promise to God, don't delay in following through, for God takes no pleasure in fools (there's that word again). ***Keep all the promises you make to him.***

Continuing in the context of reverence and respect for God, Solomon says *be careful* when you make a promise to God. Don't *mess around* with your promises to God – because God takes no pleasure in *fools* (like Mr. T on the “A-Team”).

But the repetition of this word – *fools* gives us an idea of *how God feels* about a person who spends a lot of time talking *AT* him (without saying much) and a person who makes *rash or hasty promises*.

Then, to try to make his point ever “clearer” Ecclesiastes 5:5 says,

Ecclesiastes 5:5 says (NLT)

5 It is better to say nothing than to make a promise (to God) and not keep it.

I think we get the idea, right? This is Solomon teaching us, *look, in the real world, in this life, here's how you should approach God.*

But verse 6 just *keeps hammering* the importance of *how we approach God* in his house. Solomon's still talking about *commitments made to God* and he says in Ecclesiastes 5:6,

Ecclesiastes 5:6 (NLT)

6 Don't let your mouth make you sin. And don't defend yourself by telling the Temple messenger that the promise you made was a mistake. That would make God angry, and he might wipe out everything you have achieved.

There are so many great life-lessons in Ecclesiastes and in the first sentence of verse 6 here may be one of the most all-encompassing lessons in the book.

6 Don't let your mouth make you sin . . .

That statement can stand *all on its own*.

But here Solomon is referring to the promises and commitments we make to God (and he's saying) – **Don't let your mouth make you sin . . . And don't defend yourself when you do sin . . .**

The middle of verse 6 says,

And don't defend yourself by telling the Temple messenger (the Priest) that the promise you made was a mistake.

Don't make idle promises or commitments to God and don't make excuses to God when you don't keep the promises you have made.

And the end of verse 6 tells us why.

That (you making excuses to God) **would make God angry, and he might wipe out everything you have achieved.**

YIKES!!! Where is that theology that says "I can do anything I want and God will always bless me anyway"? I can't tell you where it is – but I can tell you where it is not – It is NOT in the Bible. The Bible says our choices have consequences and our choices set the direction of our lives. We need to be careful with them.

If we are flippanant, and casual, and non-committed in our approach to God, there may well be consequences – and it is better to know that *now* than *after the fact*.

Guys, listen to me please.

Psalm 145:8–9 (NLT)

8 The Lord is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.

9 The Lord is good to everyone. He showers compassion on all his creation.

THAT IS WHO our God is *and* he is also a God *not to be trifled with*. We must approach him in the Bible's word – *fear*. It means reverence, awe in knowing who God is. So, we come to him in humility, understanding our basis of ignorance. And trusting him like a trusting father.

But we live in the age of grace – don't we? (Yes, we do). And God *has* poured out his *grace* on us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, but does that mean we can trifle with God? Does that mean we don't have to answer for our actions toward him? Does that mean we can say anything we want to God? Do anything we want against God? And flip

back and forth between serving God and serving our flesh and expect that there are no consequences to that? NO!

Listen, the fact that we fear God in the biblical way (this reverence and awe) drives our decisions. Here's a simple example.

There are things that I do and I don't do out of fear for my relationship of my wife. Not fear *of her*, but fear that our relationship would be damaged. I don't meet with women. I don't counsel women, I don't have those emotional level discussions with women. There are things I don't watch. There are things I don't look at. There are things that I fight to do because I'm afraid, because I fear for the consequences in our marriage should I do those things. Is that a good or bad thing? It's a *good thing*. There are things that this position on this side of the music stand – there's a tremendous amount of fear of God. "God, I can't screw this up. I can't blow this. I have to be careful with this."

And there's a fear that drives that, but it's not an incorrect fear. The word has multiple meanings. It's this *reverent awe*, awesomeness that says this emotion is going to drive what I do. This belief is going to drive what I do to protect my marriage, to protect this church that God has called me to protect, and that I will answer for. This is what Solomon is trying to get us to do, is use that understanding to drive our day-to-day actions.

Solomon ends this massive life lesson simply and directly.

Ecclesiastes 5:7 (NLT)

7 Talk is cheap, like daydreams and other useless activities. Fear God instead.

Instead of bringing cheap talk, we should instead be bringing a *reverent fear of God* when we gather with his people and when we approach God. When we gather with his people, instead of coming with our own agenda, or social agendas, or our own axe to grind or our own agenda to accomplish – crucify all that, and come to hear from God and obey him! That's what will transform your life! That is why we're here, right? *That's why we're here.*

Lord, you are God in heaven and here am I on earth, so let my words be few and I will always stand in awe of you.

Let's pray. *Lord, Jesus, would you just sear this into our hearts and our minds. That you alone are God. That you are God in heaven, that you are the great sovereign, omnipotent God. That you are at work at all times and in all ways for our good ultimately and eternally. That you have a plan and a purpose that we are ignorant of. But that we are part of. We have no idea what you are doing, yet you call us to join you in what you're*

doing, Lord. And so, we crucify our own ideas, our own opinions, what we see and feel and think. We crucify it all and say Lord, you are God in heaven. You and you alone. You call the shots and I will come to listen and obey. And I will always stand in awe of you.

If you could, this is what we would call a repentance message. And if you have some repenting to do, now is the time. With God big in your mind and in your heart. Heaven huge – and you small. You confess and repent and God forgives and transforms. And it starts by acknowledging what God already knows is the truth.

God, I know that I am in sin. That my heart is not turned toward you, but turned towards the world or to my “self”. Please forgive me, Lord. Please forgive me. Thank you, Jesus, for dying on the cross to forgive me. And right now, Lord, I repent from the sins that separate me from you. I repent from my self-direction and following after the world, and I turn from it – turn my back to it – and I turn to you Lord. I run to you. And I come to you just as I am, a sinner that needs to be saved by grace and I say Lord, save me. Receive me. Transform me. And fill me with your Spirit and give me your life. And Lord, make me always see you as big as you are and make my response always to stand in awe of you. For your glory in my life, Jesus, and in your name, amen.