

## Season 9: Ecclesiastes

### Episode 7: Eternity Shapes our Worship (5:1-6:12)

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**Sarah:** We're grateful to ten of those for sponsoring this season. Unconventional by Sharon Dickens is an honest, straight up account of where to start with women's ministry in your local church. Informed by her decades of experience discipling women on some of the most deprived estates in Scotland, Sharon shares the DNA for their women's ministry with humour, wisdom and challenge. It's given me lots to think about as someone who's involved in discipling women in our church family, and it's just a really helpful, practical spur. To that end, pick up your copy at [10ofthose.com](http://10ofthose.com).

**Felicity:** Welcome to two sisters in a cup of tea. We've been enjoying going through ecclesiastes in this season and we are jumping into chapters five and six this episode. Great to see you, Sarah. I've got a cup of tea. What have you got?

**Sarah:** A gluten free hobnob. Because my biscuit sympathy pangs have been growing through the season and I thought, here we are. And I've got to tell you, it tastes exactly the same as the normal hobnob, doesn't it? And I looked on the ingredients list and there's really not much difference because it's made of oats. So my opinion is, yeah, keep eating those, basically.

**Felicity:** Well, and I do have some in my cupboard, actually, because that is so far the most successful gluten free biscuit. I love that idea of biscuit pangs. I'm so grateful for those who have emailed in with some suggestions. Turns out there are a fair number of gluten free people out there. Maybe that the pangs are not just confined to me.

**Sarah:** Turns out our biscuit chat is not relevant for a fair number of listeners because they can't eat anything that we're.

**Felicity:** What we'll have to do is share the suggestions, share the love of these gluten free biscuit treats. But Sarah last episode, Karen Sewell joined us and spoke great sense and wonderful things into our ecclesiastes discussions. What was your kind of biggest takeaway, the thing that struck you most from that conversation?

**Sarah:** I mean, the fact that she made it seem simple.

**Felicity:** I know.

**Sarah:** Just well done to her. Just brilliant. I think she had this phrase which was just really helpful, and she said that the book of ecclesiastes prepares our hearts to receive Jesus and the resurrection life that he brings. And I just thought that was so wonderfully helpful. That actually if we sit in this and we sit in this wisdom and in this truth of how the world is, how broken it is and the longing that we have in it. Actually, that does us good because it prepares our hearts more and more to receive Jesus and to be then super excited for all the resurrection life that comes with Jesus. And I just thought, wow, yeah, that's brilliant, isn't it?

**Felicity:** Yeah. So just having that perspective, and I thought that was one of the great things that she kind of drew our attention to was that recognizing that we are in this broken world, but also recognizing that we are to remember our creator. And that as we do, we're to remember as well that Jesus is coming, that he has come, that ultimately, he brings that restoration that we're kind of longing for, like the frustration of this world. And we enjoy the things that we've got. But also that's not it. That what Jesus is doing. He makes the way straight. He brings restoration. Joyful things. Joyful things.

**Sarah:** Yeah, really good. Let's get going. So we're in chapter five and six today, so I'm going to read the whole thing. Let's go. 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. Do not be quick with your mouth. Do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven, you are on earth, so let your words be few. A dream comes when there are many cares and many words. Mark the speech of a fool. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools. Fulfill your vow. It is better

not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin, and do not protest the temple messenger. My vow was a mistake. Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore fear God. 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. The increase from the land is taken by all. The king himself profits from the fields. Whoever loves money never has enough. Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to their owners except to feast their eyes on them? The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether they eat little or much. But as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep. 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's 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 all their days? They eat in darkness with great frustration, affliction and anger. This is what I have observed to be good, that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink, and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them, for this is their lot. Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and to be happy in their toil, this is a gift of God. They seldom reflect on the days of their life because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart. I've seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind. God gives some people wealth, possessions and honor 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. 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. It comes without meaning. It departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is Shrouded, though it never saw the sun or knew anything. It has more rest than does a man, even if he lives a thousand years twice over, but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place. Everyone's toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied. What advantage have the wives of a fools? What do the poor gain by knowing how to conduct themselves before others? Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless of chasing after the wind. Whatever exists has already been named, and whatever humanity is, has been known. No one can contend with someone who's stronger. The more the words, the less the meaning. And how does that profit anyone? For who knows what is good for a person in life during the few and meaningless days they pass through like a shadow? Who can tell them what will happen under the sun after they are gone?

**Felicity:** Thank you, Sarah. There's a lot in there, isn't there? We seem to be getting into a bit of a mixture between the overarching themes we've had before of God being in control. We're going back to wealth a bit and then we have these kind of pithy proverbs in the middle of it as well, which is classic wisdom kind of stuff, isn't it? And working out what to do with them.

**Sarah:** Yeah, big time. There's definitely a link from chapter four, isn't there? We had something of a worship of wealth and kind of self in chapter four, and then here we're really seeing, well, the kind of right worship, really. That's how he starts, isn't it, at the beginning of chapter five? It's the right worship which is in deep humility, isn't it? I'm very struck by that phrase god is in heaven, you are on earth, so let your words be few. There's a kind of real reverence and awe of who the Lord is and what you're to do as you kind of draw near to the Lord because of your creatureliness and Him as Creator.

**Felicity:** And interesting that the first place he goes to is what you do with your words. Listening and speaking is kind of like an indicator of how much we recognize that position, I think. And as someone who has many words, that is a very challenging kind of statement, isn't it? Just that idea that as we come to worship God, as we approach the Lord, rightly, that we would want to be those who listen, rather than just bring our many words.

**Sarah:** Yeah, and I think this kind of chimes with the rest of the theme of the whole book, doesn't it, with actually fear the Lord and obey his commandments. And here that looks like really drawing near with reverence and trembling towards Him, doesn't it, because of who he is. And there's a kind of contrast then, isn't there, between those who really do worship money and wealth and just the enslaved kind of aspect of that. I don't know whether you noticed in verse ten, they never have enough, they're never satisfied. There's a kind of sleeplessness about it in verse twelve, the kind of roving appetite, never satisfied again in chapter six, verse seven, verse eight, verse nine, those who worship wealth are enslaved to that and it's harmful to its owners. Actually, in chapter five, verse 13, it's very striking, isn't it, the contrast?

**Felicity:** And I think that really fits with this idea. And we have the repetition of that word meaningless again, don't we, this Hevel word that we've talked about before, and it kind of fits with that, doesn't it? If you are chasing after that which is not going to last, and wealth is the classic example of that, then that is going to be so unsatisfying and eroding of who you are, because you're just kind of caught up in that which doesn't last. Which I think then, as we come to verses 18 and through to 20 of chapter five, because that's the challenge, isn't it? So you're like, okay, I get it, that's not the way to go, but what is the way to go? And we've had at the start of chapter five, we have that kind of approaching God, rightly, fearing God humility before our Creator. And I think then chapter five, verses 18 to 20, is really helpful in just this is what it is that I have observed to be good, that it's appropriate for a person to eat, to drink, and to find satisfaction in their labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them. And that seems to be the shift. That's the difference, isn't it? It's not so much as to whether we have wealth or not, it's how we're regarding it in light of who God is and who we are. And it's coming back to this idea of gift rather than gain, which I think we've talked about previously as well.

**Sarah:** Yeah, big time. And I think I'm really struck in a passage that starts about worship. This is worship then, isn't it? To think about your wealth and what you have, whether you feel like you have much or whether you have little, whatever it is that you have. It's a gift from God and actually it says he's the one who gives you the ability to enjoy it. And then it goes on to talk about the man who doesn't have the ability to enjoy it, that he can't grasp it, he can't enjoy it even though he has all that he would ever desire and it's fruitless. They say the contrast is to a stillborn baby, which is just kind of stark, isn't it, language. But actually yeah, in verses 18 to 20, right. And proper worship of the Lord actually looks like putting wealth in its right place as a gift to be enjoyed of what you have of it and to not be pedestaled how our culture tend to do in so many different ways. But actually to enjoy the gift that it is and to be happy with your lot and whether that's much or little. Yeah, I think that's what struck me, that kind of an enjoyment is actually a form of worship of the Lord here. I agree.

**Felicity:** And isn't that just really good to know? I feel like that gives freedom to look at what we have, whether it's a little or a lot, and to thank God for it. I love that phrase at the end of verse 20 god keeps them occupied with gladness of heart. I think that is something to pray for, isn't it? That we would have gladness of heart and so therefore enjoy what we have. And yeah, that has really been sort of resonating with me this week as I've been mulling what it is to really worship God. Rightly. And I think a big part of that is recognizing what he has given us and with our eyes on Him, enjoying what's in front of us.

**Sarah:** Yeah. And it's coming back continually again to this language of gift, not gain, isn't it? Like, actually, we're not striving after the wind, we're not striving after wealth for the sake of wealth. It's a gift. And so we enjoy the gift. And I think I don't know, as we kind of do take this to Jesus as we do start to think about how he chooses to interact with the topic of wealth. And that in the New Testament. I think what really struck me was it came to me, that bit in Mark where he talks about how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. Easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. And actually that is true, isn't it? If you are so bound up with wealth in this way that you can't sleep and you're never satisfied and you've never got enough and you're constantly clamoring after it. It's very difficult to still your heart before the Lord and see that you need Him, isn't it? And I think just taking and seeing Jesus' words and the kind of the

wisdom of the wisest preacher king and starting to see how he took that forward, it's been helpful for me in that.

**Felicity:** I think, as well. I agree that is so helpful to hear Jesus's warning in that. And it's really helpful then to hear Him again speak. In John 6:27, he talks about not working for the food that spoils that food that endures to eternal life which the Son of man will give you. And I think it's again, that reminder again and again eternity comes from the hands of the Lord. And this wealth, this worship for that which is of the moment is not running in the same direction.

**Sarah:** Yeah, bang on. I think it's just really helpful, isn't it, to see Jesus's words, kind of the root of them here and then how he fleshes them out before we wrap up. Felicity, is there a couple of things that this has really kind of hit home for you this week in terms of driving it to your own heart.

**Felicity:** I was really struck by the start of chapter five. Just this idea that listening and really being careful with how many words we use then reflects our perspective and how much I'm regarding myself rightly. And regarding God. Rightly. It's made me just, I think, approach the Lord more quietly. Not in a bad way, just in a kind of reflective way. Like before I jump in with my zillion requests, am I just fearing God? Am I revering him. And that's been a heart shift, I think, this week.

**Sarah:** What about you?

**Felicity:** Where is it taking you?

**Sarah:** Yeah, I would actually say similarly, in terms of challenged on, how does this kind of puncture the pretense that I can bring to worship? Whether that's on a Sunday at church or during the week or whatever it is, just actually yes stilling our hearts before the Lord and just remembering that he is in heaven and I am on earth and how that should shape my worship. And sitting before him. But also the enjoyment, like more and more we're seeing the enjoyment, aren't we? And actually that we have been given gifts to enjoy. And he says, do that because we don't know how long life is going to last. So enjoy the gift that you've been given, enjoy the gift of wealth, whatever that looks like for you, enjoy your lot. And I think it's just good. It's been good to kind of realize that's part of worship, actually and that's encouraging and that's challenging as well, to actually hold it in its right place. And I'm encouraged to kind of think more of that.

**Felicity:** And to pray for that gladness of heart. I think that's a big factor, actually.

**Sarah:** The Lord enable us and that he would give yeah, as he gives someone the he gives someone the wealth and possessions and the ability to enjoy them. And actually, that's a gift, isn't it? The ability to enjoy them and see them. Rightly, so would you pray for us listy as we close?

**Felicity:** Absolutely. Heavenly Father, we praise you that you show us who you are and who we are. Thank you that we can come before you fearing God and knowing that you are the gift giver. And so we pray that we'd have eyes to see what you have put in front of us. We pray that you might give us a gladness of heart. Help us to enjoy what we have in you as our eyes are fixed on you yourself. Father, please, would you help us to just keep looking to you as we walk on, seeking to be wise in this life that you've given us under the sun? And we pray this in your name. Amen.

**Sarah:** Amen. Good stuff. It's really good to be back each time, isn't it? We just want to say a massive thank you to everyone who's partnered with us to enable us to continue doing what we're doing with the podcast. We're deeply grateful for every person who chooses to listen to our conversations, who chooses to share the podcast with a friend or two, and for those who've generously given to help us make it more sustainable. Thank you so much. We'll see you next Friday as we crack on with chapter seven.

**Felicity:** See you then.

**Sarah:** Bye bye. This episode has been sponsored by ten of those.com.