

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *Full Contentment*.

Introduction: “Everybody wants to go to heaven. No one wants to die to get there.” An acquaintance at an assisted living facility reminded me of that statement. The statement captures the thought of many people. We are a people trying to put off the inevitable as long as we can. We diet. We exercise. We rest. We see the doctor. We follow the latest fitness trends. But, in the end, there is an end. We die.

Solomon reminded us of the temporary nature of this earthly existence. He shared his wisdom on how to live well before the grim reaper comes calling. Now, he teaches us how to die well. At the heart of dying well is finding contentment that comes from living in the moment in a way that honors God.

Here are three reminders to practice to die well.

1. Enjoy Life (11:7-10)

Life has a temporary and fleeting nature to it. With each passing breath and each moving step, we can never go back. Life is like stepping in a moving stream. The waters keep flowing. Live, therefore, each moment with intentionality, purpose, and joy. To enjoy life, we are to:

- Remember life has seasons. Light as well as darkness, good as well as bad, happiness as well as sadness, hope as well as despair, mountaintop experiences as well as dark valleys, are experienced in life. Life has difficult periods. They are real.
- Relish each moment. Since life is fleeting, we are to live each moment to the fullest, taking nothing for granted. With a glance at the past and an eye on the future, we delight and appreciate each minute of the present.
- Rejoice in each day. We can’t alter the experiences and circumstances life brings, and we can’t change the course of the times of light and darkness, but we can choose to be joyful. Joy is a deep settled conviction that knows that God is in control and behind the scenes of what happens to us. Knowing that God has us in his sight and under his care enables us to be joyful in spite of difficult circumstances and disappointing seasons. Joyful living is a wise choice.
- Realize the judgment. At the end of life, there is an accounting. The books will open, and we will have to explain our actions. God will bring all of life into judgment—the steps we took, the words we spoke, and the attitudes we displayed. Every secret deed whether good or evil will be judged (12:14). Sort of like school, in the end, there is a test. God will judge us all.

2. Fear God (12:13)

The enjoyment of life does not imply living as we please, but rather fearing God as we live. Fearing God is a common emphasis in all Hebrew wisdom literature. It's a repeated command in scripture, mentioned around 300 times. In fact, Solomon reiterated this command, "Fear God," multiple times: 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12, 13; and 12:13.

At the heart of fearing God is not dread or terror, but a deep reverence of God, standing before him in awe. The author of Hebrews provided a good description of this reverential fear: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28-29). Reverence and awe are the motivating factors for us to remember (12:1) as we stand before the Creator of the universe.

Fearing God includes an understanding of how much God hates sin and understanding his judgment on sin—even in the life of a believer. Solomon reminded his readers of God's judgment (11:10; 12:14). As children, the fear of discipline, coming from a loving heart, from our parents no doubt prevented some evil actions on our part. The same should be true in our relationship with God. We should fear his correction, and, therefore, seek to live our lives in such a way that pleases him.

3. Keep His Commandments (12:13)

Fearing God will impact the way we live our lives. And when we fear God, subsequently, obedience will characterize our lives. As it has been said, "The greatest visible evidence to the fear of God is obedience to God."

That obedience is reflected in Solomon's command to "keep his commandments." Obedience is a central theme throughout Scripture. From the story of creation to the end of Revelation, it's difficult to turn a page that doesn't deal—directly or indirectly—with God's call for obedience. As a result, God places a high premium on our obedience.

In our day, however, obeying God's commands often is ignored, dismissed, or glossed over. Why? Because obedience slaps us in the face. It confronts our sin, challenges our lives, runs contrary to our unwritten mantra: Who are you to tell me what to do.

God commands us to obey, not because he is on a power trip, but rather because he wants what's best for us. God's commands are not to kill our fun, but to increase our enjoyment. God's commandments are not to box us in but rather provide a wall of protection. Disobey those commands, and quickly we will see how much sadness we can experience. Disobedience leads to trouble.

Here are four reasons for keeping his commands.

- Obedience proves our salvation. One of the evidence or signs of knowing that we know God is that we obey his commandments.
- Obedience transforms our lives. Knowing God results in a changed life, expressed in words, deeds, and attitudes. A lack of change is a sure sign that we don't know God. God's truth transforms our lives.
- Obedience springs from our love. A believer keeps the commandments because of the love relationship between him and God.

- Obedience characterizes our life. Believers live like their Master. Just as Jesus lived in obedience to the Father, so will his followers.

Conclusion: The reason we heed this three-fold advice—enjoy life, fear God, keep his commandments—is because our time is limited. Life under the sun will soon be over. Our lives pass quickly. Time is running out. The following poem says it best:

When as a child, I laughed and wept, time crept;
When as a youth, I dreamed and talked, time walked;
When I became a full-grown man, time ran;
When older still I daily grew, time flew;
Soon I shall find in traveling on, time gone.

Rick Ezell is a pastor and writer, living in Greenville, SC. Read more of his writings at www.rickezell.com.