

LIVING ON THE RAGGED EDGE: COMING TO TERMS WITH REALITY

THE FEW YEARS OF A FUTILE LIFE

ECCLESIASTES 6



The Heart of the Matter

In our previous message, we gave serious consideration to the subject of money. We realized again that material things cannot satisfy; neither can an abundance of money. Those things are unable to provide some of our most essential needs: security, happiness, satisfaction, and contentment. The chapter we are looking at in this message builds on all those thoughts by carrying the subject to its logical conclusion. These twelve verses frame a painfully realistic portrait . . . another in a long line of “under-the-sun” scenes. It’s the tragic picture of a man, old and weary, who has come to the sunset years of his life. Long shadows fall across his memory as he stares out the window on his past. As we shall discover, the word-painting could be called simply *futility*.



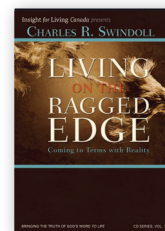
Discovering the Way

1. Some Shadowy Snapshots of Life

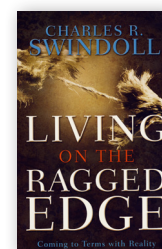
Solomon’s words in Ecclesiastes are like a gallery of snapshots depicting life “under the sun”; however, the portrait we find in chapter 6 is painted in dark, drab colors that communicate inner turmoil, conflict, and pain. As we examine its description more closely, we’ll realize it’s a self-portrait of a disillusioned monarch. This moment of Solomon’s introspection may be troubling, for it will force us to examine our own lives, both in the dim light of the world under the sun and in the bright illumination of God’s perfect revelation.



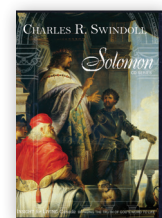
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2. An Enlargement of One Particular Portrait (Ecclesiastes 6:1–12)

Solomon zooms in and focuses on the condition prevalent among those who try to find satisfaction apart from God: when God gives these individuals riches, wealth, and honor, God also prevents them from enjoying the benefits of their riches, wealth, and honor. But why? Many “under-the-sun” thinkers would call this a cruel irony, an unfair twist. But Solomon reminds us:

- God is sovereign. He is the eternal creator and sustainer of every living thing.
- Man is *not* sovereign. We are finite, limited in strength, sinful, and irresponsible.
- Disputing God’s sovereignty is a waste of time and effort. We must accept God’s rule in our lives.



GETTING TO THE ROOT

Who Will Enjoy Your Wealth?

Although most instances of the Hebrew word *nakheriy* refer to literal foreigners from another nation (1 Kings 11:1, 8; Ezra 10:2), in Wisdom literature it can sometimes have a figurative meaning: one who is like a “foreigner” or “stranger” (Job 19:15; Proverbs 2:16; 5:10).¹ In Ecclesiastes 6:2, the foreigner who benefits from another’s wealth comes from a different family.

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Starting Your Journey

Our greatest need is not to study more about Solomon but to take a look inside our hearts and ask:

- *Does your life today seem futile?* More than likely, it does to all of us at times. And when we become frustrated, bewildered, and discontent, we often dispute with God rather than acknowledge our utter ignorance compared to His infinite wisdom.
- *Does your future seem fearful?* None of us knows what our future holds or what will come after we've gone. The very fact that our best laid plans frequently have to be revised is ample proof of this. However, Christ has assured us that if we build our lives on Him, then whenever the inevitable storms of life come, we will stand (Matthew 7:24–27).

In the midst of futility and frustration, does it help you to know that your life, though short, plays a part in God's unfolding plan? In response to this truth, are there circumstances or attitudes you need to specifically turn over to God in faith?

ENDNOTE

1. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 648–49.