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**Living with the End in Mind**  
**6 – Enjoying God’s Good Gifts**  
Pastor Ted Cunningham

We are in Part 6. We are about halfway through. At the end of today, we’ll be halfway through the Book of Ecclesiastes. This will take us to the end of February. Today, we’re talking about Enjoying God’s Good gifts, and we are going to talk about contentment.

Maybe you’ve heard it said that the goal of marketing is to make you unhappy with what you currently own. Does anybody know what I’m talking about? You should be bored with it. The iPhone 13 is a piece of junk; you want the 14, right? That’s marketing. I’m convinced though that technology is now at a place where if marketing says I want something, technology is now built to say you can no longer use what you have, you must get the next thing.

Maybe I’m becoming an old, grumpy, curmudgeon but I have to tell you I am so sick and tired of updates. Is anybody with me? I’m just tired of updates. I knew the 8:30 would be with me. Your watch, your phone, your television, your computer, everything was working great yesterday until you woke up this morning and they said, “Sorry, I know everything was dialed in perfect, but we have an update that will take you three to four days to get back to your normal life.” I hate it. I hate everything about it.

We have a television, the other night, this is where Amy and I are at. It says, “We’re going to do an update that takes five minutes.” We didn’t wait the five minutes. we turned the television off and we were done for the night. I don’t even have the patience for five minutes of an update. My watch isn’t working this morning because it needs an update and it’s needed one since October. I don’t know why I put the thing on every day because when I need to tell time, I have to pull my phone out.

We were driving to Chicago the day after Christmas. It was Amy and I and Carson was in the backseat. Amy has a newer car with the bells and whistles. We’re driving up the road and I start blaring the country music. Carson goes, “Dad, can you put the music up front?” You’ve had your kids to that. I said, “No.” I’m usually more agreeable than that. He asked me a second time. “No, seriously, Dad, I’m trying to listen to something. Can you please put the music up front?” I said, “I won’t. I’m not going to do it.” Third time, I could see him in the rearview mirror looking at me like what is his problem today. “Dad, I’m asking nicely. Would you please put it up front?” I said, “Let’s just be honest, Carson. I don’t know how.” My fear is if I put it up front, we’ll never get it in the back again. Amy and I figured it out. Not only did we put it in the front, we put it on the left front speaker so stereo is done in Amy’s car from here on out.

So, 8:30, as you become old and senile and hate technology like I, what we're learning in Ecclesiastes is to ask these relevant, searching questions about the meaning of life. Today, we are going to talk about Enjoying *God's Good Gifts* because we talk a lot about God blessing us, but do we talk enough about once we've been blessed and we have some wealth or have some possessions... When we say wealth today, I just love what Jimmy talked about last week. He put it in perspective for those of you who think you might not be wealthy. He put it in a perspective of the whole world, saying we have some things, we are blessed in this nation, but do we talk enough about the ability to enjoy what God gives us?

In the first two verses in Ecclesiastes 6, Solomon says, ***I have seen another evil under the sun...*** If you are new to our series, with under the sun, we're just talking about life here upon earth, this side of heaven. ***...and it weighs heavily on mankind: 2 God gives some people wealth, possessions and honor, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire...***

So, what happens when you've been blessed, when you've received possession, when you've worked a little bit in your life, you have a few bucks, you have a home, you have a car, you're dressed, you're here today. ***...but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them...*** He is the giver of these gifts and the one who enables us, who gives us the ability to enjoy them. And we've all met people, we've all been guilty of this ourselves – not going God's way and not enjoying what he has given us the way he has called us to enjoy them. We want to look at that today. How do you enjoy these gifts? So, people do not have the ability to enjoy them. ***...and strangers enjoy them instead.*** We're going to see that played out more in this text. ***...This is meaningless, a grievous evil.***

John Piper, summing up the first two verses of Chapter 6, says this: *"The Book of Ecclesiastes is meant to expose the emptiness and futility and frustration and final misery of life."*

Don't stop there because this would be a depressing book to be in. The solution here is he's talking about all of this without God. So, you and I are talking about how we pursue life and get the end of life? Today we are going to see not just the possession that we may gather in life and the wealth we may accumulate, but what happens too if you live a long life, and you live many years and you have many children and yet you do all of that without God. It's futile, empty. You've wasted your time.

But then this is what Verse 2 is driving at. *"One man gets rich and gets the ability to enjoy his riches. Another man gets rich and loses his ability to enjoy it. We are going to see two ways specifically today how that happened. "And the lesson for both is don't set your heart on riches." - John Piper* This is the key, this is our takeaway for the day, it's where we start and where we're going to end. Enjoy what you've been given, but don't live there.

We're going to build this out today. Here's the secret for us. It is not a secret. I love this. And I love how Dave Ramsey often brings that up. We talk about the secret of this and the secret of that. It's not a secret. God is not keeping any of this from us. Pursue life with God and enjoy what he has given you.

If you want to enjoy what God gives you, be grateful, receive it with thanksgiving, be generous. Your parents taught you this, the Bible teaches us this. Learn to share. You are a steward of what God has given you. Don't keep it all to yourself. Learn to give freely. And, we're really going to get to this one

today, be content. Let your mind and your... What your eyes see, Solomon is going to build out what it sees right now, what is in front of you right now, learn to be grateful, generous, and content with that rather than letting your appetite constantly move toward the next and strive toward the next.

I want to make sure as we go through this today that we are thinking about it as parents. I've told my kids for years, "I don't mind spoiling you so long as you never act spoiled." I think that's how God treats us. "I don't mind blessing you so long as you never act like a spoiled brat, acting entitled and like you deserve it, and you are owed this."

Our friend, Carey Nieuwhof, puts it this way. "Kids who feel entitled to everything will be grateful for nothing. Kid's who feel entitled to nothing will be grateful for everything." That's where we want to drive today with the generosity piece.

Eugene Cho says it this way, "Generosity is what keeps the things we own from owning us."

Today we're talking about how to enjoy and not allow the good gifts that God gives us, that we've seen in the first several chapters of Ecclesiastes. How do we keep them from owning us? How do we keep them from creating greed in our hearts. How do we keep them from moving us toward entitlement? How do we keep these good gifts where they need to be – continually pointing us to the Giver and not resting and settling with just the gift?

In Luke 12: 15, Jesus is saying, "**Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.**" You came into this world with nothing, and you are going to leave with nothing.

Last week, we were in Chapter 5 of Ecclesiastes. I just want to talk briefly about two ways in which people are unable to enjoy what they have been given. Verse 13, 14 – **13 I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners, 14 or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when they have children there is nothing left for them to inherit.**

I want to ask this question of this group today. How many of you have a collection, you collect something. What do you collect? He collects airplanes. Again, there are four ways to give at this church... I was not expecting airplanes. Are you talking full size airplane? Oh, okay, little airplanes. How may collect cars? Anybody like jewelry, spoons, that type of thing? Now I know I'm going to get hands raised on this in the 11:30 but I just want to check on the 8:30. How many collect shot glasses? There is nothing wrong with a collection, but it's the whole Book of Ecclesiastes and it's what Jimmy said last week about dreams. There is nothing wrong with dreams. Dreams void of God, let them be far from you. I don't want to waste my time with those. Collections void of God. What do you do with a collection? You should be grateful. You should be generous. I never intended to collect this, but I have a collection. I collect stickers. I'm a really extravagant individual. They are primarily fly-fishing stickers. I gather them from all over and people give them to me, and I buy unnecessary amounts of them, but I have a whole drawer full of them. When our kids get a new water bottle and they want to put some of the stickers... Yeti has a ton of stickers, too.

My son will bring his water bottle in, and I'll open the drawer and I don't know what comes over me, but I'm like, "Help yourself." *But there are few of them I've hidden way down in the bottom that I hope you don't see.*

My favorite sticker of all... Remember Bernie Sanders wearing the mittens? I have that sticker of him sitting on a Yeti, holding a red fish. It's my favorite sticker. I've moved it to another drawer, so it doesn't end up on my son's water bottle. I love that sticker. Isn't that terrible? Can I tell you how much that sticker cost - \$3.99. And I'm holding it like... That's ridiculous. This is insane. But this is what our possessions do; they get a grip on us if we're not careful. Even something as simple as a sticker.

I love this show – American Pickers, with Mike and Frank, but I have to tell you I'm yelling at the screen sometimes. I don't understand. They'll go to some guy's place, and he'll have 14 shipping containers in the back of his property that have weeds growing up taller than the shipping containers. They'll open one that hasn't been opened in 20 years. They'll dig through it. Mike will get in there like a rat through a maze, get all the way to the back, pull out this rough sign and go, "Man, I like this. I'll give you \$100.00 for it." What does the guy say? "No, I think I'm going to hold on to that."

I'm sitting there with Amy going, "He hadn't seen it in 40 years. And I don't want to bring up the obvious, bro, you're 92 years old. You ain't got many years left upon this earth. And your kids are going to have to come and open up all... they are going to sell these containers by the lot. What in the world..." But we do this. We let our stuff just build and collect. This not how God intended for us to enjoy. Hoarding to the harm of its owner.

This is one show I can't watch. I don't watch this show (Hoarders). I'm sad when I watch that show. I deal with enough sin and sadness and brokenness in the world as part of my job that when I come home, I don't want to consume it as entertainment. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? So, I don't watch sad things on television. It's why I won't be watching the Cowboys tomorrow night. I'm just not going to watch it. But I did watch the Jaguars. That was unbelievable. Amy was like, "What has happened to you?" I'm like, "I don't know. I'm staying awake way longer than necessary." With this show, you deal with mental illness, and you deal with people who have just allowed it to stack up waist high, shoulder high to the ceiling high in their home.

We have a story in this town of a home that was recently purchased by someone. I was talking to a realtor in our town. A couple died. They were younger than me. You could point a lot of their death back toward hoarding. It actually took their life just because of what they were living in and the way they were living. It's sad.

I go back to collections and this movie just popped in my brain this week. Does anybody remember Mr. Miyagi's car collection in Karate Kid. This was a big part of Danielson's training. I went back and you can rewatch just this clip when Mr. Miyagi walks out and just goes to Danielson, "Choose." What does Danielson say? He says, "No, no, I can't." Mr. Miyagi Says, "Choose." I don't know a lot about cars, but I think he picked the nicest one. It's definitely the one that pops off the screen. He gets in it and they just have this moment of honor. As he's driving off, it's the most iconic line in the movie Mr. Miyagi is yelling, "Bonsai Danielson! He says it three times. You see nothing but joy in Mr. Miyagi.

They're not trying to teach a spiritual lesson in Karate Kid right here, but you get it. This is exactly, follower of Jesus, what we're called to do with what we have. And when we give, there is great joy.

I'm going to give just this practical application. You don't have to do this, but maybe think about it. If you have a collection, consider offering something from that collection this week to someone. I don't need a toy plane... When you said planes, I was like, "This is it, Lord, the church is getting a plane." I'm just kidding. We ain't going to be that church. Only at 8:30 do I say that; that does not go out online.

Consider it. What an opportunity. I'm going to give away Bernie Sanders this week. The moment I give it away, I will be online ordering two more. So, I know it's a little different if you collect cars. I know some of you who are like, "Oh, it easy to give a sticker away. I gotta give a car away?" I'm not telling you to do anything. But what joy... And as I hand that sticker to whoever it's going to be, it will be "Bonsai!" I don't want harm brought to me because of the things I need to hold onto.

I have a dear friend in this church who is a perfect example of this. I remember him telling me years ago, "Everything I own is yours. Whatever you need, Ted, take it. If you just need to borrow it or take it, it's yours." And you go, "Well, that was hyperbole, that was just him having a spiritual moment. He was dead sincere. You're like, "What have you got? What did you take from that?" Nothing that I've asked for. But, again, he's just like this with everything. I just notice that successful people share. His hands are never empty because he has more to give.

**3 A man may have a hundred children and live many years...** So, now we're talking about you've been blessed with possessions and now you've been blessed with long life and family. **...yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial...** I have to be honest. This is going to get to a pretty difficult part in the text. And the word picture Solomon is going to use to describe this person who goes through a meaningless life, who goes through a life accumulating, possessing, building wealth, and it's all void of God. Here's how he's going to be compared. **I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.** This is difficult, but what he's driving at here is that stillborn child is at least going to a place of rest. Whereas the man that may live 100 years becoming very wealthy, spinning his wheels... Or, as Solomon would say, chasing after the wind, he's had no rest and his life has been meaningless. He uses a stillborn child in that comparison.

**4 It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. 5 Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man...** Who has just chased after the wind and ended along, prosperous life with no meaning. That's a tough text to read.

**6 even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?** That man and that stillborn both end up in the grave. Not an easy text to process through. Now in Verse 7, we're going to get into some Proverbs. **7 Everyone's toil is for their mouth, yet their appetite is never satisfied.** So, now we're going to move to this idea of contentment. **8 What advantage have the wise over fools? What do the poor gain by knowing how to conduct themselves before others? 9 Better what the eye sees...** In other words, what he is saying is what's in front of you, what you already have, what you've already earned, what you've already accumulated, what you've already been given. Better that **than the roving of the appetite.**

Picture this in your mind. What's in front of you, what you have, the roving of the appetite is constantly overlooking that. It's right here but I can't keep my eyes on it and I can't be thankful for it and I can't share this because I'm constantly looking for more. We call that the myth of more. More will satisfy me. If I just get more of this... And that is the inability to enjoy what you have. You're not taking full advantage of what you've already been given because your appetite is striving for more. ***This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*** The idea here now that is brought to us is contentment. Let's talk about what the Bible says about contentment. Enjoy what you have rather than longing for what is out of reach.

**1. Contentment keeps me grounded in Christ.** I don't know who said it. I know a lot of pastors say this so, I don't know who to attribute it to, but I've been thinking about it all week. Jesus plus nothing equals everything. So, whether you have little or you have much, whatever your bank account, whatever your collection, whatever you possess, whatever square footage is in your home, we receive it with thanksgiving, we share and we're generous, and we learn to be content with it. contentment keeps me grounded in Christ.

We read in Hebrews 13: 5, ***Keep your lives free from the love of money.*** If you're new to the church, if you're new to the Bible, if you're a new believer, you may have heard it said... because it pops up online from time to time in memes. Money is the root of all evil. That is not what the Bible teaches. Possessions are not the root of all evil. Wealth is not the root of all evil. The love of money... As Jimmy shared last week, you can't love both God and money because you will end up serving the one and hating the other. So, it's not about how much you have and it's not about wealth. That's not evil. But it is the love... So, keep your lives free from this is what the scripture teaches us. ***Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have because God has said "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you."*** Possessions with God, that is what begins to bring meaning. It keeps me grounded in Christ and I want Christ to be my source, not my stuff. You hear it said around here often. People, places, things are a terrible source of life. Your spouse is not your source of life. Your children are not your source of life. Your job is not your source of life. Your bank account is not your source of life. Your paycheck is not your source of life. Jesus is your source of life. Keep that first and foremost.

**2. Contentment avoids conflict with others.** James says in Chapter 4: 1-2, ***What causes fights and quarrels among you?*** Every time I read this, I think about the sandbox or the playground. This is where most of us learn to share. I'm not against organized sports at all. I think organized sports are great. But I do caution parents from putting their children into them too early because they need to spend some time in unorganized activities on the playground because that's where you and I learned our life negotiation skills.

I'm just telling you, Mom and Dad, especially the helicopter parents in the room, let me encourage you. Go put your child on a playground and back off. Let them learn how to share. Now, you can step in if there is going to be harm done, if there is bullying... I get all that. But I'm saying when there is one toy and two children, let them be the ones to figure out what to do. And then you get to teach them. When you see the tug of war happening and they sound like those birds on Nemo – "Mine, mine, mine."

This doesn't just happen to us when we are children. What causes quarrels among you, follower of Jesus? ***Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?*** Don't they come from that place where I want something and I don't get it. This is the source of discontentment – I want something but it's out of reach. So, I'm not going to enjoy this because that thing I keep striving for, I keep chasing after I can't have. So, it causes quarrels and fights. ***2 You desire but do not have, so you kill.*** I'm going to take it by force. ***You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.*** And even James... I just hope you see this throughout all of scripture. ***You do not have because you do not ask I.*** You have forgotten the source. And you think it's the other person. When we are content with what we have, it brings health to our relationships.

Amy, you're loving this message, aren't you. My wife hates hoarding. I don't know how I throw so much stuff away, but I've been going down to the transfer station throwing stuff away. She says, "Ahh, man," when we pull out of the driveway full of nonsense." She says, "It's like this spiritual, emotional, relational burden is lifted from my shoulders." I don't have that same experience. I'm the one looking where my tires are going at the transfer station for all the roofing nails to make sure I'm not leaving with a punctured tire. She lives by the motto – every square inch you own owns you. It can get a grip on you. Let's not let this stuff... I love it when she tells me, "Hey, let's just have some fun today." I'm like, "I'm ready for fun; what are we doing?" she says, "Pick ten things in your closet that you can donate." I was thinking we could go to Cracker Barrel. But let me tell you, in marriage and family, with our children, at work, right? The quarrels and fights you have at work because of that promotion that you want that you think you deserve, and it is yours is given to someone else. What causes quarrels and fights among you? It's you want it, but you can't have it, so we grumble, complain, argue.

**3. Contentment gives me peace in all circumstances.** This brings Philippians 4: 13 that is often misquoted in the church, into biblical context. What Paul is going to do is talk about the extremes in life. We might use the term... Whenever I read this, I think of feast or famine. You've all experienced this. We've had good years and we're like feasting. And you've had rough years in your business or in your home and that was like famine. Paul says, "I've learned the solution to feast or famine. I know the key to that. I know how I can weather the differences between the two. ***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..*** Not anything I want. That's often how we read Philippians 4: 13. I can do whatever I set my mind to. I can name and claim it. No, the secret is ***I can do all of this*** – highs and lows – ***through him who gives me strength.*** In all circumstances. Whether I have little or much.

**4. Contentment enjoys the simple things in life.** When you're content... I think sometimes... I've never been to Italy, but Amy and I watch a lot of movies about it. We may one day go there, I don't know. I love when I see Italians sit down for lunch with a basket, outside, near a vineyard. They pull out a loaf of bread, a thing of cheese, and a tomato. And this is their lunch. My first thought is we should have some protein on this. They cut a couple of slices of bread, a couple of slices of cheese, they have a tomato. I know I just had chicken fried steak for lunch with mashed potato and it's heavy and I'm feeling it still, but those simple things in life. We need to be grateful when we go out to lunch today or we go home and we have our food and our drink and just relax in a home.

Maybe it's not the perfect home for you and maybe it's not the home you've always wanted, but I hope you kick back in your home... This is why I think the tiny home movement has taken off. People are like, "I not only want to enjoy the simple things in life, but I want to pursue the simple things in life and be grateful. You read this all the way through Ecclesiastes. If I'm finding joy in food and drink and my labor under the sun, I will be content with that.

In 1 Timothy 6: 6 -10 we read, ***Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world and we can taking nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we are going to praise our father in heaven today.*** I think this was what Jimmy was driving at all last week. You're wealthy more than you know. If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those that are always striving for what's out of reach, those who want to get rich...

Have you ever had anybody try to sell you on a business that they are in, and they are wanting you to get in to it and you can make a lot of money. I always love when people ask me, "What would you do with an extra couple thousand dollars a month? I always love to respond the same – "Oh, I don't want that burden. I don't have time for that." I have dear friends that just sold a business. They made a lot of money and I just see it resting on them. They have a huge responsibility now. I'll tell people, "I've got so much going on in my life with family and ministry and all that, I don't have time for that. I don't even have time to manage that extra money or business. Some of us need to just not only be grateful for the food and clothing, but let's be grateful for the work that God is sending you to later today or tomorrow or this week.

***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.*** Here it is again. It's the love of money. It's not money that's the root of all kinds of evil, it's the love of money. ***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.*** Because you can't serve both God and money. You're going to pick one or the other. Today, we are seeing it's life and possession with God, not without him.

Let's end in Ecclesiastes 6: 10 -12 as we talk about God, the divine providence. It's how the chapters starts and It's how the chapter ends. I know sometimes we believe that we know better than God. We know our needs better than God. We know what would satisfy us better than God. And that's what the last three verses are going to deal with – the limitation of our human wisdom. We like to ask God and we've been taught that today. If you don't have, ask God. But let's be very careful, follower of Jesus, that we don't demand things from God. We can be grateful for what we have. We can ask the Lord, but understand our limitations. His divine providence is unchanging, it's inscrutable but we live with sin and we often have this idea that man knows best. We live with this idea that I know what's best for me. No, God knows what's best for me.

***10 Whatever exists has already been named, and what humanity is has been known...*** God knows from beginning to end, you don't and I don't. ***...no one can contend with someone who is stronger.*** Yet, we do it with God. And look at Verse 11. We think well let's just fill the room with words. Let's just continue to let our knowledge pour forth. ***11 The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone? 12 For who knows what is good for a person in life...*** And here we go back to the

vapor which is the theme throughout all the scripture. ***...during the few and meaningless days they pass through like a shadow?*** We are here for a short time. Let's not misuse the blessing God has given us. Let's make the most by being grateful, generous, and content. ***Who can tell them what will happen under the sun after they are gone?***

Two things I read this week to just encourage you as we close. Warren Wiersbe says, *"If you devote your life only to the pursuit of happiness and the gathering of possessions, you will be miserable, you will find no joy in life. However, if you devote your life to doing God's will, you will find happiness as well for the long run."*

Paul David Tripp said, *"Creation was never designed to satisfy your heart. Creation was made to be one big finger pointing you to the one who alone has the ability to satisfy your heart. The contented heart is satisfied with the giver and is therefore freed from craving the next gift."*

That's the point of this whole message and the point of this whole chapter. That we would be grateful for the gift in front of us rather than living with the constant craving of the next gift. And that we would leave here grateful for that. Every time you give, every time you tithe, every time you give an offering, it is a reminder to each and every one of us that we are stewards of all that God has given us. We own nothing. He owns it all. That's why we read in Acts, ***In him we live and move and have our being.*** He is the source of all life.

Father, in the name of Jesus, we receive our good gifts today. We will be grateful for food and drink and the work that is ahead of us this week. We receive it with thanksgiving. We'll be generous. We are not going to be hoarding what you've given us. We know that life is not about the accumulation of our possessions, but our joy is found in you and you alone. So, what you give us, may we have open hands with it to give to those who are need, to leave for our children, to care for those around us. Whatever is brought before our eyes this week, whatever is given to us this week, may we say thank you for what our eyes see rather than striving for that next gift.

Thank you for how you have provided for this church. We are nothing but grateful and I know we joke about not wanting to screw this up, but we want you to be the one that receives all the glory, all the praise for everything going on in this church, and how you use us. Use us how you will to continue to use this community and to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

We pray this in the authority of the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.