



## ecclesiastes 5:1-7

*5:1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. <sup>2</sup> Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. <sup>3</sup> For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.*

*4 When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. <sup>5</sup> It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. <sup>6</sup> Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? <sup>7</sup> For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear*

## commentary

In chapter 5, Solomon takes a break from his lament to discuss worship and how we ought to approach God.

**1** This passage takes place within the context of temple worship. For Israelites in this time, the temple was associated with worship toward God. It was where God chose to dwell and reveal himself in a special way to those who would pilgrimage there to worship. The temple was therefore seen as the holiest place. It is interesting, then, how Solomon begins this section on worship by urging his pupils to “guard your steps” when they go to worship at the temple. For Solomon, worship does not begin at the temple, it begins with preparation of a right life. This phrase, “guard your steps” was meant in their culture to consider their ways or look at one’s life and see if it is integrated with worship to the holy God.

This worshipful lifestyle is true reverence. Reverence is not merely a pious demeanor, nor a the ability to look holy when worshipping. It is having a lifestyle that matches the worship given to God. Countless times in scripture, God is repulsed by worship that is not backed up with a right life. He hates hypocritical worship. All such worship cannot be called worship at all. It would be better to not offer our empty words than to blaspheme God by appearing to be aligned with him and his purposes.

Part of the problem is that we need to recognize that worship is about God and not us. If our lives are disdainful in any way (and make no mistake about it, they are), we must come to worship humbly accepting that we are not worthy to worship our great God apart from his grace in Christ Jesus. This kind of “worship” whereby we are unable to see our wrong is merely foolishness.

One might be wondering at this point, “okay, if I’m repulsive and cannot worship without being a hypocrite, why try?” This is where we take hold of the good news of the gospel! As we come to worship, we analyze our life. We take inventory. We ask of

ourselves, does my life match what I profess? Hopefully the answer is no. Only when we recognize our depravity and God's goodness are we able to approach him. Then we repent and ask God to forgive us where we fall short and receive his forgiveness (1 John 1:5-10). At that point of repentance and forgiveness is where we meet with God and are unified with his Spirit in worship of his Son whose grace is sufficient. We are able to worship only because of Christ's sacrifice to make us right with God again.

**2** When we approach God, we do not come to tell, as much as we come to listen. Our attitude in toward God is one of attentiveness. Worship should not be seen as "the next best experience," although a good experience is a gift to be enjoyed. Worship means seeking God and his will, then allowing God to change us on the basis of what we hear. This is exceedingly difficult in our culture because we are consumers. The great paradox of worship is that in order to experience God, our primary desire cannot be to just have a great personal experience. This is a self-driven focus. God desires our hearts and minds as we worship in spirit and truth. God does not need to be told how to be worshiped. Rather, we approach his throne knowing we need to be taught to how to make our lives a sweet fragrant offering once we leave the walls of church and go on our way.

**3** Our cares can keep us from hearing God's still small voice. We get our plans and dreams and they make us excited, which is not necessarily wrong in and of itself. The problem is when our excitement for the plans cause us to believe we've found the apex of life. What we accomplish in life is never as important to God as how much our life circumstance shape us into worshipers who value nothing more than Jesus. If we lose sight of this, our worship becomes deluded because we are unintentionally shoving Christ to the periphery and shoving the dreams we believe he's given us to the forefront. Instead of thinking about God and releasing our worries and consumed minds to his care, our time of worship is distracted. Anybody who has had one of their dreams blow up in their face knows that we must receive any dreams God gives us with fear and trembling, knowing that, whether or not he guided us there, his purpose is to shape us. Jesus, not the dreams he gives us, are the focal point of worship.

Once again, Solomon relates this to the fool who comes to worship to tell God about all of his dreams and aspirations. God is not impressed.

**4-5** Our intentions in worship can often seem good, but the test is if, when God urges us to change, we are willing to do so. If we take God seriously and trust him, we will fulfill our vows and not jump quickly into making vows we can't keep. This goes back to the fact that God does not appreciate empty worship. It is better not to vow that to make a vow and not fulfill it.

**6** Who he temple messenger is, is a mystery. Regardless if Solomon is referring, here, to the official at the temple who would collect offerings, an angel, or God, himself, the point remains that if we should not make a vow that we have to take back. This typically happens in worship when we are so emotionally moved that we start spouting out promises that we will never be able to keep. We also fall into the trap of making deals with God when things are not going so well. "If you do this for me, God, then I'll do this..." We say these things because it feels right in the moment, but it would be wiser to enjoy the moment of exuberance, or give our petitions to God in a season of hardship, but seriously consider our vows before we make them. God does not want to elope with us to Vegas. Rather, He is most pleased with vows that

mean something, especially in an age when lasting commitment is null and a person's handshake does not mean much.

**7** Finally, Solomon summarizes the attitude required for worship -- to fear God. A fool comes into the place of worship with a list of dreams, goals, and instruction for God. He spouts off his mouth like a greedy little kid at Christmas time on Santa's lap, not concerned at all about the fact that Santa had to come all the way from the North Pole to sit there in that boring department store. While God is not at all bored and his love for you is genuine and very personal, we foolishly avoid His feelings and avoid listening to him. He has sacrificed everything for you. Fear of God means we approach him with a willingness to learn and receive from him, and our desire, above all, is to submit ourselves to his rule. After all, He is God.

## personal reflection

**Sunday** - Read Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 and reflect on the sermon from this morning. How was your view of worship challenged? How will you approach worship differently, now?

**Monday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 5:1. Take some time to "guard your steps." Which direction are you going right now? Take time to ask God to reveal where your steps are taking away from Him and ask him to help you change.

**Tuesday** - Ecclesiastes 5:1 suggests that we listen when we go to worship. Today, take your journal, simply sit quietly, and ask God to open your thoughts to him. If thoughts come to your mind that aim to distract you, maybe this is what you can pray about. Write your thoughts.

**Wednesday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 5:2-3. How is your prayer time and time of worship misdirected sometimes by your own heart and desires? Consider what you are pursuing in your life (your dreams) that may be crowding out your pursuit of Jesus.

**Thursday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 5:4-6. What are you vowing to do for God. Are you taking your vow seriously? Are you committed to fulfilling it or would you like to "take it back!?" Take some time to consider the vow you are having a hard time fulfilling. What might it look like if you honored God and kept your promise? Take time to thank God for keeping his promises to you.

**Friday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 5:7. Take some time to ask God to forgive you where you have attempted to supersede him. Take time to tell him all the reasons why he is great. It is a good idea to write these down as you tell him. This can serve as a helpful reminder.

**Saturday** - Read Psalm 66 as a prayer, taking time to contemplate each phrase and offer it as worship to God.

# group discussion

**Ice Breaker:** What is your favorite dish at Thanksgiving feast?

## **Read through Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 as a group.**

1. Where does worship take place?
2. Look throughout this passage and list what Solomon observes as foolish ways to approach God.
3. Which foolish ways do you think are most true and least true in your life? Why?
4. What are some good ways to “guard your steps” in preparation for worship? (guard your steps = watching the direction you are going)
5. Why does God seem so down on us talking so much?
6. Define “dreams” as it seems Solomon is putting it here (v. 3). What are some of the dreams that consume us and force Jesus to the periphery in worship?
7. Why do “dreams” become an end for us?

## **Read vs. 4-6**

8. These verses discuss the importance of keeping vows. Why does our culture not seem to value keeping one’s word?
9. What would be different about our world if people kept their word to each other? To God?

## **Read v. 6-7**

10. Discuss this sentence: Apart from grace through Jesus, your worship always angers God.
11. Why is standing in awe of God the key to pleasing God?
12. Considering everything you’ve discussed as a group, define worship.



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