

Week Four – *Simplify Your Surroundings*
Ecclesiastes 5:10-15

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Have you ever lived on a steady diet of junk food? Maybe while on a vacation or a student's budget? Perhaps this describes you during this past holiday season? How did you feel during that time?
2. Eventually everyone recognizes that there's no satiety in eating only empty calories. Ultimately we all crave healthy food. The problem with living on food intended to be a treat is that we're using it for the wrong role. What other things in life can we misuse in the wrong role?
3. Read Ecclesiastes 5:10-15. What does Solomon, the author of Ecclesiastes, warn us against in verse 10?
4. How is *loving* money using it for the wrong role?
5. Money is a blessing from God. It's meant to take care of us and to provide for our needs; it was never meant to satisfy our souls. According to Isaiah 58:11, what/who will satisfy us?
6. End your FIFTEEN by reading Psalm 145:15-17. Use these words as you pray.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

7. There's an old saying: "Where there's a will, there's a relative." What does this quote suggest about the lure money has for people?
8. Read Ecclesiastes 5:11. Solomon was perhaps the wealthiest man of his time, maybe ever by relative standards. He knew a thing or two about the entrapments of wealth. What do you think he meant by, "As goods increase, so do those who consume them?"
9. One thing we know is true: the more we consume, the more our appetites seem to increase. As a result, we can increase! Describe an example where you've seen this happen.
10. Verse 11 also suggests that the more goods we have, the more people will surface to consume our abundance. Describe a time when you saw this happen.
11. Read Proverbs 14:20-21. What does wealth attract?

12. If wealth naturally attracts “friends”, how can we tell if a friend is true and not just interested in what he or she can get from us? How does it feel to not know how to tell the difference?
13. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Confess those times your interest in being a friend to someone was not borne out of pure motives. Then ask God to always turn toward others in the spirit of true friendship.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

14. A trap often includes an element of surprise and often some kind of bait. The element of surprise can be something of which we are completely unaware (I didn’t know that the pothole was there) or it can be something we know is there, but has an unexpected consequence (I had no idea the pothole was that deep.) What is the difference between not realizing a trap is there and not understanding the consequences of it?
15. Read 1 Timothy 6:9-10 and answer the following questions.
- What kind of trap is described in these verses?
 - What is the bait?
 - What can be the consequences of this trap?
 - Do you think anyone who desires to be rich wants to suffer the consequences described in verse 10? Why or why not?
16. Read Ecclesiastes 5:11-12. What is the consequence for those who live for the accumulation of goods as described in verse 12? How can the accumulation of too many things adversely affect this area of your life?
17. How important is sleep to the quality of your life?
18. An estimated 164 million Americans struggle to get a good night's sleep at least once a week and in 2015 spent an estimated \$41 billion on sleeping aids and remedies. Clearly, Americans have sleep issues. What steps could you take to reduce your stress in order to improve the quality of your sleep, i.e., get rid of clothes you no longer wear to make it easier to find what you’d like to wear?
19. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Ask God to help you see things you can trim from your life to make it easier to rest and experience sweet sleep

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

20. I recently purchased a beautiful teakwood napkin & utensil holder from Costco on impulse. It seemed the perfect thing to keep my utensils organized. When I opened the box at home, the lengthy care instructions included a *weekly* polishing with olive oil. I intended this object to serve me, not expect a weekly massage. Have you ever purchased something and realized that the upkeep was going to be much more work than you had anticipated? What was the fate of that item?

21. Are you in the habit of considering the upkeep on something before you purchase it? How might doing this affect your purchases? Would you be more or less likely to make a purchase if you did consider that factor?
22. Read Luke 12:15 and write in your own words the warning in this passage.
23. Do you feel as though you can appreciate all the possessions you have or is there a point where your enjoyment of any one thing decreases because of the responsibility of maintaining your possessions?
24. Read Ecclesiastes 5:13. How can you tell if you've reached the point where the possessions you've accumulated are causing you harm? (Hint, see Day Three's study this week.)
25. Finish your FIFTEEN by taking some time to thank God for the possessions He's given you. Then ask Him to help you see if there is something out of your abundance with which you need to bless someone else.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

26. If you're doing this study on day five of this week, it's been just over a month since Christmas. Think back to a Christmas gift you were pretty excited to receive. How do you feel about it now? Has the feeling faded? Explain your answer.
27. Some gifts can be satisfying on their own, but often the intention behind the gift makes the appreciation of the gift have staying power, even after the gift is gone. What makes the intention behind a gift so powerful?
28. Read Ecclesiastes 5:13-15. How can wealth be hoarded to the harm of its owner?
29. We've all heard horror stories of people filling their homes with duplicates of many items in case they're needed someday. What often drives people to hoard things?
30. What often happens to all of their belongings after they are no longer living in their homes because of death or inability to care for themselves?
31. Read Proverbs 11:25-26. What is the result of hoarding versus living generously?
32. I once had a wise friend tell me that I had a faith issue after I had admitted holding on to things that I knew I'd never use again, but I was keeping them just in case I needed them. She asked me if it would be better to give those things to someone I knew would use them, trusting God to provide for me if ever I needed them, versus keeping them and hoping they'd be used. How does her advice affect your perspective on holding on to things you no longer use?

33. Ecclesiastes 5:15 reminds us that everyone comes naked from their mother's womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. As you conclude your FIFTEEN, ask God to help you develop a plan to simplify your surroundings by keeping material possessions in perspective.