

The Misery of NOT Fearing God  
Ecclesiastes 12:13

Un-Ecclesiastes – The Misery of NOT Fearing God

Many of you are familiar with [The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis](#).

It's a fanciful, but insightful series of letters written by a "senior" demon – Uncle Screwtape- to his young apprentice demon, Wormwood.

Uncle Screwtape is giving Wormwood advice on how to handle his patient, a new believer. Wormwood's task is to guide the Christian "patient" away from the Enemy (God/Christ) and toward the "father below." (Satan)

As you read the book you have to remember that its advice is backward, or at least for us as believers.

Scripture speaks about spiritual warfare and the schemes of the devil. It is clear about the reality of the dark elements of the spiritual realm. That's not to say that there's a devil behind every bush, but we are warned that Satan is like a roaring lion seeking who he may devour.

I recently came across an article that has the flavor of Screwtape Letters, but it is not written by a Christian. It comes from a psychotherapy networker name Chloe Madanes. The article is entitled "[The 14 Habits of Highly Miserable People](#)" – [the Art of Self-Sabotage](#). read her comments by clicking here [https://www.alternet.org/personal-health/14-habits-highly-miserable-people?paging=off&current\\_page=1#bookmark](https://www.alternet.org/personal-health/14-habits-highly-miserable-people?paging=off&current_page=1#bookmark)

As I read the article it struck me that this woman was tapping into some common grace insights about life, and she was reinforcing the Wisdom of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. I don't think she was doing it intentionally, but she did underscore the importance of biblical wisdom.

So I decided to make it a two part sermon Series – "Un-Ecclesiastes"

It's a primer for "Foolish living under the Sun"

Rom 7

The premise is simple enough. Sure, people say they want happiness and fulfilled lives, but they act contrary to those words. I would offer a caveat that is not in the article – There are real issues of chemical imbalance and medical concerns that can impact our lives, but in general the article finds its way into some common grace insights.

\*\*BTW if you really want to get a glimpse of life "under the sun" just read the comments section of almost any online article.

The author raises questions about the actual steps people often engage in that lead to differing degrees of misery in life. Even though most folks would say they want to be happy, they unintentionally pursue paths that are the opposite of happiness or well-being. As we see in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, there is a path of foolishness that is made up of decisions that we make, and that path does not lead to "shalom" or a sense of well-being.

Biblical wisdom is not just having the right information or desire for the right thing. It is acting in ways that will bring about the result.

EX: I enjoy playing tennis, and in my mind I'm making the great shots. But if I really wanted to make those shots it would require the practice and the discipline to play at a higher level.

So too in the Christian life. We are to pursue wisdom. We are to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness. Being grounded in the grace of God we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

In a Screwtape letters style, Madanes gives some advice that is backwards as she gives the 14 Habits of Miserable people. She asks, "Why would someone (even yourself perhaps) actually want to be miserable? There must be some benefit, right?"

Well of course there are many **benefits to acting miserable** such as:

- **Attention and Care:** People feel sorry for you. They might actually feel guilty because somehow they are at fault. If so, you may have hit a jackpot, and now you can manipulate that person to do all kinds of things for you.
- **NO Hopes, NO Desires, NO Cares, NO Disappointment:** When you and your world are all worthless and meaningless then there is nothing to gain or lose. You are NUMB. Misery can be a powerful anesthetic allowing you to disconnect and check out from the world. And the more disconnected you are... the more miserable you can act.
- **You are brooding and intelligent:** People will assume you are a profoundly deep-thinking intellectual. The shallow, happy people could never understand or appreciate the burden of your insight and existential wisdom and understanding of the world. If you are not miserable, then you are not paying attention...

So, if you really want to perfect the art of misery, then let's learn how to do it effectively.

**"1. Be afraid, be very afraid, of economic loss.** The art of messing up your life consists of indulging these fears, even when there's little risk that you'll actually suffer such losses. Concentrate on this fear, make it a priority in your life...

At the end of his life, Sir Winston Churchill said, "I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened!"

Fearing economic loss has several advantages. First, it'll keep you working forever at a job you hate. Second, it balances nicely with greed, an obsession with money, and a selfishness that even Ebenezer Scrooge would envy. Third, not only will you alienate your friends and family, but you'll likely become even more anxious, depressed, and possibly even ill from your money worries.

*Exercise: Sit in a comfortable chair, close your eyes, and, for 15 minutes, meditate on all the things you could lose: your job, your house, your savings, and so forth. Then brood about living in a homeless shelter.*

Matt 6:33; Hebrews 13:5

**Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"**  
**6 so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"**

EX:  
Grinch-a  
schedule  
for “self-  
loathing”

**2. Practice sustained boredom.** Cultivate the feeling that everything is predictable, that life holds no excitement, no possibility for adventure, that an inherently fascinating person like yourself has been deposited into a completely tedious and pointless life through no fault of your own. Complain a lot about how bored you are. Make it the main subject of conversation with everyone you know so they'll get the distinct feeling that you think they're boring. Consider provoking a crisis to relieve your boredom.

A side benefit of being bored is that you inevitably become boring. Friends and relatives will avoid you. You won't be invited anywhere; nobody will want to call you, much less actually see you. As this happens, you'll feel lonely and even more bored and miserable.

In scripture and in real life for 2000 years those who follow Christ have found that living with, by and for Him is not boring. If you find that a relationship with God is boring, then you're not doing something right. You don't see many bored people in the Bible unless they've let their hearts grow dull. Jesus said to his disciples, “follow me and I'll make you become fishers of men”. Paul said that “we are ambassadors for Christ.” **If you are bored and want to spice up your life, then start telling others about Jesus.** Turn off the TV, put down the social media and engage with those who don't know Christ. **BECOME A DISCIPLE MAKER**

**3. Give yourself a negative identity.** Allow a perceived emotional problem to absorb all other aspects of your self-identification. If you feel depressed, become a Depressed Person; if you suffer from social anxiety or a phobia, assume the identity of a Phobic Person or a Person with Anxiety Disorder. Make your condition the focus of your life. Talk about it to everybody, and make sure to read up on the symptoms so you can speak about them knowledgeably and endlessly.

**Remember your identity as a beloved daughter or son of the Living God. Your understanding of how God sees you will shape the direction of your spiritual life.**

If you live in fear under the frown of God, then life has no joy and you'll always be walking on eggshells. In ways we all struggle with viewing God like that volatile parents who was erratic and scary. We must understand that as believers, God calls us SAINTS – chosen of God, holy and beloved.

**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.* 1 2Cor 5:17**

**Rom 8:1 – There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

**Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Col 3**

**4. Pick fights.** This is an excellent way of ruining a relationship with a romantic partner. Once in a while, unpredictably, pick a fight or have a crying spell over something trivial and make unwarranted accusations. The interaction should last for at least 15 minutes and ideally occur in public. During the tantrum, expect your partner to be kind and sympathetic, but should he or she mention it later, insist that you never did such a thing and that he or she must have misunderstood what you were trying to say. Act injured and hurt that your partner somehow implied you weren't behaving well.

Another way of doing this is to say unexpectedly, "We need to talk," and then to barrage your partner with statements about how disappointed you are with the relationship.

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

10For,

"THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS,  
MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT.

11"HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD;

HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.

12"FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS,  
AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER,

BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL." 1 Pet 3

**5. Attribute bad intentions.** Whenever you can, attribute the worst possible intentions to your partner, friends, and coworkers. Take any innocent remark and turn it into an insult or attempt to humiliate you. ...The idea is to always expect the worst from people and be easily offended. Try this at home, work, or church. (...And if a person asks what's wrong, don't say a word: let him or her suffer.

I did a whole sermon on this 8/27/17 – check it out online or the App.

1 Cor 13...Love is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

**6. Whatever you do, do it only for personal gain.** Sometimes you'll be tempted to help someone, contribute to a charity, or participate in a community activity. Don't do it, unless there's something in it for you, like the opportunity to seem like a good person or to get to know somebody you can borrow money from some day. Never fall into the trap of doing something purely because you want to help people. Remember that your primary goal is to take care of Numero Uno, even though you hate yourself.

*Exercise: Think of all the things you've done for others in the past that haven't been reciprocated. Think about how everyone around you is trying to take from you. Now list three things you could do that would make you appear altruistic while bringing you personal, social, or professional gain.*

But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. 7For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 1 Tim 6

If you want to do something for gain, then pursue godliness. Don't settle for the trinkets of this world but go for what is eternal.

C.S. Lewis's remarkable sermon "[The Weight of Glory](#)":

If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. *We are far too easily pleased.* (26)

There is a “personal gain” or “self-interest” theme in the Bible: 1 Tim 6:6, Matt 6:33 “Seek ye first, all these things shall be added unto you.” “It is more blessed to give than to receive”

2 Cor 9:6-8 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

7. **Avoid gratitude.** “Research shows that people who express gratitude are happier than those who don’t, so never express gratitude. Counting your blessings is for idiots. What blessings? Life is suffering, and then you die. What’s there to be thankful for? Don’t let well-meaning friends sabotage your efforts to be thankless by reminding you of the spiritual blessing you have or quoting bible verses about thankfulness.”

That advice taps into a portion of Ecclesiastes – life has suffering and hevel- but the response of wisdom is to enjoy the simple gifts and the giver by giving thanks.

A lack of thankfulness is the mark of a foolish person and one who is miserable.

Romans 1: the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness.....For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22Professing to be wise, they became fools,

HOW IS ALL OF THIS BAD ADVICE GOOD NEWS???

By way of contrast, IT POINTS US TO THE WAY OF WISDOM and to the Person of Jesus.

Jesus is the God-fearing man:

§ He did not fear loss because He trusted the Father

§ He was not bored because He gave Himself to an eternal Mission and kingdom

§ He lived out of the Identity he heard from the Father – “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” Those who know Jesus by faith get the same identity

§ He did not “pick fights” – though he ruffled feathers at times, through his death he united those from every race and tribe who put their trust in Him.

§ Jesus knew the heart of men and women yet He was vulnerable and calls imperfect people to be His ambassadors.

§ He lived a life of thankfulness to His heavenly Father and trusted Him even at the point of death on a cross.

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