

Ecclesiastes 4 Commentary

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THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

The Search for Significance

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All is Vanity	Vanity of Doing	Vanity of Having	Vanity of Being	Using Life Well	Source of True Living					
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Subject	Sermons		Summary							
Fickleness of Life Versus Fear of the Lord										
Place: "Under the Sun"										
Decades of Searching (in the days of King Solomon) circa 936BC										
King Solomon Author										

Ecclesiastes 4:1 Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them.

KJV Ecclesiastes 4:1 So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.

BGT Ecclesiastes 4:1 καὶ περιέψα γὰρ εἰδὼν σὺν πάσῃ τῇ συκοφαντίᾳ τῇ γίνομεν πάντας λιονταρίας καὶ δοκιμασίας τὸν συκοφαντούμενον καὶ οὐκ οὐδεὶς αὐτῷ παρακαλεῖν καὶ πάντας χειρὶ συκοφαντούμενον αὐτῷ συγχέειν καὶ οὐκ οὐδεὶς αὐτῷ παρακαλεῖν

LXE Ecclesiastes 4:1 So I returned, and saw all the oppressions that were done under the sun: and behold the tear of the oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of them that oppressed them was power; but they had no comforter:

NET Ecclesiastes 4:1 So I again considered all the oppression that continually occurs on earth. This is what I saw: The oppressed were in tears, but no one was comforting them; no one delivers them from the power of their oppressors.

CSB Ecclesiastes 4:1 Again, I observed all the acts of oppression being done under the sun. Look at the tears of those who are oppressed; they have no one to comfort them. Power is with those who oppress them; they have no one to comfort them.

ESV Ecclesiastes 4:1 Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.

NIV Ecclesiastes 4:1 Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed-- and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors-- and they have no comforter.

NLT Ecclesiastes 4:1 Again, I observed all the oppression that takes place under the sun. I saw the tears of the oppressed, with no one to comfort them. The oppressors have great power, and their victims are helpless.

- **Then I looked again:** Job 6:29 Mal 3:18 Ec 3:16 5:8 Ec 7:7 Ex 1:13,14,16,22 2:23,24 5:16-19 De 28:33,48 Jud 4:3 10:7,8 Ne 5:1-5 Job 24:7-12 Ps 10:9,10 Pr 28:3,15,16 Isa 5:7 51:23 59:7,13-15 Mal 3:5
- **the tears:** Ps 42:3,9 80:5 102:8,9 Mal 2:13 Jas 5:4
- **they had:** Job 16:4 19:21,22 Ps 69:20 142:4 Pr 19:7 La 1:2,9 Mt 26:56 2Ti 4:16,17

Related Passages:

Ecclesiastes 3:16 Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness.

Ecclesiastes 5:8 If you see **oppression** of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight; for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them.

Ecclesiastes 7:7 For **oppression** makes a wise man mad, And a bribe corrupts the heart.

Oppression under the sun by the powerful

OPPRESSIONS AND SUFFERING IN A FALLEN WORLD

Ray Stedman - In Ecclesiastes 4 and 5, the ancient Searcher of Israel answers a question all of us have asked at one time or another. Whenever a tragic circumstance occurs, or a terrible injustice is revealed, somebody is sure to remark, "You say your God is a God of love, but how could a God of love allow such a thing to happen?"....Sometimes the question is more personal: "How can you say God loves me when he lets me work my fingers to the bone and allows other people who have inherited wealth spend their days enjoying themselves?"....In Chapter 4 the Searcher now discusses the remaining three objections to the idea that God has a wonderful plan for our life. First, he addresses the objection we have already referred to -- oppression in society.

John Butler - This chapter contains some more observations of vanity in life. It is a pathetic view that sees nothing beyond this earth. The view is strictly horizontal without a vertical consideration. THE OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTER:

- A. The Vanity in Suffering (Ecclesiastes 4:1-3)
- B. The Vanity in Success (Ecclesiastes 4:4-6)

- C. The Vanity in Singleness (Ecclesiastes 4:7–12)
- D. The Vanity in Status (Ecclesiastes 4:13–16)

Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression (abuses of power) which were being done under the sun (on the godless earth) - I looked again at all the acts of oppression is a **hyperbole** because ultimately only the omniscient God sees all oppression. Apparently even in his own kingdom he witnessed oppression of the poor by the powerful and although he was in power he was sensitive to the injustices of life. **Oppression** is rare noun (asuqiyim - Job 35:9, Ec 4:1, Am 3:9) and is plural so literally is "oppressions" (more than one!) which is usually the reality in the lives of oppressed people. **TWOT** says **asuqiyim** derives from a verbal root 'ăsaq which "is concerned with acts of abuse of power or authority, the burdening, trampling, and crushing of those lower in station."

Wikipedia says "**Oppression**" is malicious or unjust treatment of, or exercise of power over, a group of individuals, often in the form of governmental authority. Oppression may be overt or covert, depending on how it is practiced." It speaks of exploitation, abuse, injustice. Life under the sun is **dog-eat-dog**, with nobody **looking out for nobody but number one**. Solomon is describing life apart from God rather than controlled by God.

Let me show you why you need to be careful with commentaries. Bob Utley (who I frequently quote and is very conservative) makes a dogmatic statement saying "This first verse of chapter 4 clearly shows that Solomon is not the author. He had the power to confront and correct injustice (cf. 3:16; 5:8), but our author sees it and is helpless." He discounts Ec 1:1, 12, which clearly "trump" this verse. Be an Acts 17:11+ Berean in the commentaries (including the one you are reading)! Utley goes on to wisely comment "Life apart from God is "dog-eat-dog"; "me-at-any-cost"; "power-makes-right" humanity! If fallen humanity is left to itself, it will corrupt everything!"

Michael Eaton points out that "Between Eccl 4:1 and Eccl 10:20 Ecclesiastes resembles the book of Proverbs, with short epigrams dealing with various aspects of life." (Borrow [Ecclesiastes : an introduction and commentary page 90](#))

William MacDonald - Robert Burns said, "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn!" Sensitive hearts in every age have been grieved to see the **oppression** that is carried out by men against their fellowmen. It tormented Solomon also. (Borrow [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

And **behold** (*hinneh*; Lxx = *idou*) I **saw the tears** (evidence of distress and sorrow) **of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort** (*naham/nacham*; Lxx = *parakaleo* console, show compassion to) **them; and on the side of their oppressors** (*ashaq*; Lxx = *sukophanteo* = accuse falsely, bring false charges, blackmail; harass, oppress; extort, defraud, cheat) **was power, but they had no one to comfort** (*naham/nacham*; Lxx = *parakaleo* console, show compassion to) **them.** - He uses "**behold** (*hinneh*; Lxx = *idou*)" to make sure we pay attention to the suffering, sorrow and helplessness of the oppressed, for they are voiceless and have no one to comfort them, no advocate, no rescuer! The oppressors exert their power over the vulnerable. No **comfort** is emphasized by repetition. This verse is an illustration of Eccl 3:4+ "a time to weep."

Donald Glenn - Plaintively Solomon lamented the desperate and hopeless plight of the oppressed who cry out for help but find none because of the irresistible power and authority of their oppressors. The repetition of the words they have no comforter emphasizes their plight. (See [Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament - Page 986](#))

William MacDonald - From this vantage point, it seemed that "Truth [was] forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne." He could not see that "behind the dim unknown, standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own." (Borrow [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

*The hopeless and the helpless ask, "Who can we turn to?
Where can we go for deliverance?"*

Ray Stedman - What accounts each of us could list of similar circumstances! Oppression almost invariably preys on the helpless, the weak and the infirm, the people who cannot defend themselves. The Searcher knows this. Notice how he records the anguish, the misery that it causes. He speaks of "the tears of the oppressed," the weeping, the sorrow and the brokenness which the oppressed feel over something they can do nothing about. Then he twice categorizes the awful sense of helplessness that is evoked by oppression. There is "no one to comfort" the oppressed of a world filled with this kind of thing. The hopeless and the helpless ask, "Who can we turn to? Where can we go for deliverance?"

Warren Wiersbe - "Politics" has been defined as "the conduct of public affairs for private advantage." The nation of Israel had an adequate judicial system (Ex. 18:13–27; Deut. 17; 19), based on divine law; but the system could be corrupted just like anything else (Eccl. 5:8). Moses warned officials to judge honestly and fairly (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17), and both the prophet and the psalmist lashed out against social injustice (Ps. 82; Isa. 56:1; 59:1ff.; Amos 1–2). Solomon had been a wise and just king (1 Kings 3:16–28), but it was impossible for him to guarantee the integrity of every officer in his government. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

NET NOTE on **Then I looked again** - The prefixed vav on וְשִׁבְתִּי (véshavti, vav + perfect 1st person common singular from שׁוב, "to turn") might be: (1) introductory (and left untranslated): "I observed again"; (2) consequence of preceding statement: "So I observed again"; or (3) continuation of preceding statement: "And I observed again."

This section is closely related to the preceding: Qoheleth's observation of oppression (Ec 4:1–3) links back to his previous observation of oppression and injustice (Ec 3:16). It stands in stark contrast with his admonition for man to enjoy life on earth as the reward for one's work (Ec 3:22). Now, Qoheleth turns his attention to consider the sorry fate of those who are not able to enjoy life on earth and their work because of oppression (Ec 4:1–3), over-obsessive competitiveness (Ec 4:4–6), and loneliness (Ec 4:7–12).

THEN I LOOKED AGAIN - Heb "I turned and I saw." The phrase וְשִׁבְתִּי ... וְאָרַאָה (véshavti ... va'er'eh, "I turned and I saw") is a verbal hendiadys (the two verbs represent one common idea). Normally in a verbal hendiadys, the first verb functions adverbially, modifying the second verb which retains its full verbal force. The verb וְשִׁבְתִּי (vav + perfect 1st person common singular from שׁוב "to turn") is used idiomatically to denote repetition: "to return and do" = "to do again" (e.g., Gen 26:18; 30:31; 43:2) or "to do repeatedly" (e.g., Lam 3:3); see HALOT 1430 s.v. 5 שׁוב; BDB 998 s.v. 8 שׁוב; GKC 386 §120.e: "I observed again" or "I repeatedly observed." On the other hand, the shift from the perfect וְשִׁבְתִּי to the preterite וְאָרַאָה (vav + Qal preterite 1st person common singular from רָאָה, ra'ah, "to see") might indicate a purpose clause: "I turned [my mind] to consider." The preterite וְאָרַאָה follows the perfect וְשִׁבְתִּי. When a wayyiqtol form (vav + preterite) follows a perfect in reference to a past-time situation, the preterite also represents a past-time situation. Its aspect is based on the preceding perfect. In this context, the perfect and preterite may denote definite past or indefinite past action ("I turned and considered" as hendiadys for "I observed again" or "I repeatedly observed") or past telic action ("I turned [my mind] to consider"). See IBHS 554–55 §33.3.1a.

ALL THE ACTS OF OPPRESSION - Heb "all the oppressions" or "all the oppression"; alternately, "all the various kinds of oppression." The term עֲשָׁק ('osheq) denotes "oppression," e.g., Jer 6:6; 22:17; Ezek 18:18; 22:7, 12, 29; Pss 73:8; 119:134 (see HALOT 897 s.v. 1 עֲשָׁק; BDB 799 s.v. 1 עֲשָׁק). It occurs several times in the book, always in reference to personal rather than national oppression (4:1; 5:8 ET [5:7 HT]; 7:7). The noun הַעֲשָׁקִים (ha'ashuqim) is plural and articular (Heb "the oppressions"). The article indicates a generic class ("oppression"). The plural may be classified in one of two ways: (1) a plural of number, which refers to specific kinds of oppression that occur on earth: "the various kinds of oppression"; (2) an abstract plural, which is used to refer to abstract concepts: "the oppression"; or (3) a plural of intensity, which describes the oppression at hand as particularly grievous: "awful oppression" or "severe oppression." The LXX renders it as a plural of number: συκοφαντίας (sukophantias, "oppressions"), as does the Vulgate. Most English versions treat it as a plural of number: "the oppressions" (KJV, ASV, NAB, RSV, NRSV, MLB, YLT); however, a few treat it as an abstract plural: "the oppression" (NJPS, NIV, Moffatt).

WHICH WERE BEING DONE - Heb "is done." The term גַּעֲשִׁים (na'asim, Niphal participle mpl from עָשָׂה, 'asah, "to do") is a probably a verbal use of the participle rather than a substantival use (NEB: "all the acts of oppression"). This verbal use of the participle depicts durative or universal gnomic action. It emphasizes the lamentable continuity of oppression throughout human history. The English versions translate it variously: "[all the oppressions that] are done" (KJV, ASV, Douay, YLT), "[all the oppression] that goes on" (NJPS, Moffatt), "[all the oppressions] that are practiced" (RSV, NRSV), "[all the oppressions] that occur" (MLB), "[all the acts of oppression] which were being done" (NASB), "[all the oppressions] that take place" (NAB), "[all the oppression] that was taking place" (NIV).

THE OPPRESSED - The term הַעֲשָׁקִים (ha'ashuqim, Qal passive participle mpl from עָשָׂה, 'ashaq, "to oppress") is a passive form, emphasizing that they are the objects of oppression at the hands of their oppressors. The participle functions as a noun, emphasizing the durative aspect of their condition and that this was the singular most characteristic attribute of this group of people: Their lives were marked by oppression.

TEARS OF THE OPPRESSED - Heb "the tear of the oppressed." Alternately, "the oppressed [were in] tears." The singular noun דְּמַעַת (dim'ah, "tear") is used as a collective for "tears" (2 Kgs 20:5; Isa 16:9; 25:8; 38:5; Jer 8:23; 19:7; 13:17; 14:17; 31:16; Ezek 24:16; Mal 2:13; Pss 6:7; 39:13; 42:4; 56:9; 80:6; 116:8; 126:5; Lam 1:2; 2:18; Eccl 4:1); see HALOT 227 s.v. דְּמַעַת; BDB 199 s.v. דְּמַעַת. It is often used in reference to lamentation over calamity, distress, or oppression (e.g., Ps 6:7; Lam 1:2; 2:11; Jer 9:17; 13:17; 14:17). The LXX translated it as singular δάκρουν (dakroun, "the tear"); however, the Vulgate treated it as a collective ("the tears"). Apart from the woodenly literal YLT ("the tear"), the major English versions render this as a collective: "the tears" or "tears" (KJV, ASV, NEB, NAB, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NJPS, MLB, NIV). The term דְּמַעַת functions

as a metonymy of association for “weeping” (e.g., Isa 16:9; 8:23): “the oppressed [were weeping with] tears.” The genitive construct **דְּמַעַת הַאֲשֻׁקִים** (dim’at ha’ashuqim, literally, “tear of the oppressed”) is a subjective genitive construction, that is, the oppressed are weeping. The singular **דְּמַעַת** (dim’at, “tear”) is used as a collective for “tears.” This entire phrase, however, is still given a woodenly literal translation by most English versions: “the tears of the oppressed” (NEB, NAB, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, MLB, NIV, NJPS). Some paraphrases attempt to fill out the meaning, e.g., “the oppressed were in tears” (Moffatt).

NO ONE TO COMFORT - tn Heb “comforts.” The verb **נְחַם** (nakham, “to comfort”) is used as a metonymy of effect (i.e., comfort) for cause (i.e., deliverance), e.g., it is used in parallelism with **גָּאַל** (ga’al, “to deliver”) in Isa 52:9 (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 560–67).

William Barrick ([Ecclesiastes 4 Commentary](#)) on Ec 4:1-3 - Four elements in verse 1 accentuate the text’s emotional intensity: (1) the root word for “oppress” occurs three times; (2) “behold” lends a dramatic effect; (3) “tears” and “comfort” highlight the emotional side of the situation; and, (4) the repetition of “no one to comfort.”² The writer does not approach this section dispassionately; he personally identifies with the reality of oppression, with the abuse of power.

*Possessors of power
are the perpetrators of oppression*

The writer employs the root word for “oppress” only two other times in the book (Eccl 5:8 and Eccl 7:7). Elsewhere, Solomon uses the root five times (Ps 72:4; Prov 14:31; 22:16; 28:3, 17), demonstrating that he had knowledge of oppressive rulers and their oppressed subjects. Possessors of power are the perpetrators of oppression (“on the side of their oppressors was power,” Eccl 4:1). Solomon observes the “tears of the oppressed,” revealing his sympathy for them. Oppressed persons feel helpless and hopeless, because they have “no one to comfort them” (stated twice for emphasis).

Similar declarations occur in Job 16:2; 21:34; 30:28 and five times in Lamentations 1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21 as well as Psalm 69:20, Isaiah 54:11, and Zechariah 10:2 in order to emphasize a pathetic condition. The repetition sets the stage for the later discussion of loneliness and companionship (vv. 7–12). Readers of the New Testament cannot help but be reminded that God’s people receive comfort from all three Persons of the godhead (Acts 9:31; 2 Cor 1:3–7).

Solomon congratulates (or, praises) the dead for being better off than the oppressed who cannot enjoy their life under the sun (Eccl 4:2; cp. Job 3:3–5, 11–19; Jer 20:14–18). In Eccl 3:15–17 the writer advances future divine justice as the resolution of oppression. Here (Eccl 4:1–3), however, death itself (even before the time of divine vindication and establishment of justice) offers a better alternative. This is consistent with the logical development of the text, since the writer introduces a discussion of death in the intervening section (Eccl 3:18–22).³ Even better off is the individual who never existed, who had never been born (Eccl 4:3). Such “better (than)” axioms occur 23 times in Ecclesiastes. The form also characterizes many of the wisdom statements contained in the central sections of the book of Proverbs, where they appear 24 times.

H. C. Leupold declares that, “There is nothing skeptical or cynical about such an attitude. It is the only permissible estimate that can be put upon earthly values apart from the heavenly.”⁴ Long ago, Franz Delitzsch commented on the statement that death or non-existence is better than living with oppression: “so long as the central point of man’s existence lies in the present life, and this is not viewed as the fore-court of eternity, there is no enduring consolation to lift us above the miseries of this present world.”⁵ Solomon’s early assertion that God has “set eternity” (Eccl 3:11) in the hearts of human beings supplies a source for hope in the midst of the negative experiences of life.

For those who deny Solomonic authorship for Ecclesiastes, the text’s discussion of oppression appears “awkward when attributed to the mind of Solomon. Not only could Solomon have done something about oppression, but he, according to the historical books, contributed heavily to it in the last days of his life (1 Kings 11).”⁶ Such an approach ignores the depth of Solomon’s God-given wisdom, the breadth of his international relationships, the extent of his access to situations in many neighboring lands, and the variety of his personal experiences.

Scripture condemns the abuse of power. God consistently reminds His people of the sins of exploitation and oppression (Exod 22:21; 23:9; Lev 19:13; Deut 24:14; Ps 62:10; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5). The godly not only refrain from oppressing others, they will actively seek justice for the oppressed (Deut 16:19–20; Ps 106:3; Prov 21:3, 15; Isa 1:17; Mic 6:8; cp. Matt 23:23; Col 4:1).

2 See these elements identified by R. N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 81.

3 Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC 14 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1993), 306.

4 H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 104.

5 Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, trans. by M. G. Easton, *Commentaries on the Old Testament*, C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch (reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 274.

6 Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William

Charles Bridges on Ec 4:1-3 - A SINFUL world is a world of selfishness. Men—instead of feeling themselves to be members of one great body—each bound to each other in mutual helpfulness—live only to “seek their own” (Eph. 4:16, with Phil. 2:21) at whatever cost to their fellow-creatures. Solomon had already taken one view of this sad spectacle. He had seen with his father “the vilest men exalted—the throne of iniquity framing mischief by a law.” (Chap. 3:16, 17, with Ps. 12:8; 94:20, 21.) He now returns and considers. He takes a wider survey. He sees oppression in every corner—not only in the courts of justice—but in every sphere—not only for the sake of godliness—but all the oppression that was done under the sun.¹ Behold!—he cries—the tears of such as be oppressed. The power also on the side of the oppressor darkens the picture. It is like Israel in “the iron furnace”—dragging along a heavy chain of life in a wearisome existence. (Exod. 2:23, 24; Deut. 4:20.) Twice does he allude to the deep and poignant aggravation—no comforter—no one to afford relief to soul or body. The tyranny of the oppressor here reaches his summit of cruelty. This keen trial has often been the lot of the Lord’s suffering people. “I looked on my right hand”—said a true child of tribulation—“but there was no man that would know me; refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.” (Ps. 142:4. Comp. 2 Tim. 4:16.) Nay, was not this beaten track consecrated by the footsteps of the Son of God? “Reproach hath broken my heart; I am full of heaviness; I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for Comforters, but I found none.” (Ps. 69:20.)

Sympathy with sorrow is indeed a precious privilege. “Remember them that be in bonds” (under oppression) “as being bound with them.” (Heb. 13:3.) If we cannot tread in the footsteps of a Howard, might not much more be done? Might not there be a more active, self-denying alleviation of suffering? Might not prayer and effort be in more lively exercise to bring the sufferers to an interest in the endearing sympathy of “The Man of sorrows”—so tenderly—even in his glorified state “touched with the feeling” of his people’s sorrow? And yet how very little do we realize the sorrow of others; either because they are at a distance from us, or because we have ourselves no intelligent and experimental acquaintance with the particular pages of the history of sorrow!

As to the sorrow here expressed, Mr. Cecil mentions that he often ‘had a sleepless night from having seen an instance of cruelty in the day.’¹ Our tender-hearted poet thus gives vent to his indignant grief:—

Oh, for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade,
Where rumour of oppression and deceit,
Of unsuccessful or successful war,
Might never reach me more! My ear is pain’d,
My heart is sick with every day’s report
Of wrong and outrage with which earth is fill’d.
Task, Book iv.

So keen were Solomon’s sensibilities, that, looking at the comparison merely in the light of temporal evil, he considered death, or even non-existence, preferable, as a refuge from this suffering lot. The patriarch, in his crushing sorrow, looked to the grave as his hope of rest. “There”—said holy Job—“the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor.” (Job, 3:17, 18.)

Look onward to the great end. Behold the tears of such as were oppressed—then to be “wiped away”—when “the rebuke” of the oppressor “shall be taken away from off all the earth. (Isa. 25:8.) Meanwhile let us be careful to cherish our sensibilities—not in barren sentimentalism, but in practical exercise. Our Great Pattern not only gave his tears but his blood, for the misery of man. Not only did he weep for sorrow as the fruit of sin, but he “laid down his life” for it. (1 John, 3:16.)

Behold (02009) **hinneh** is an interjection meaning behold, look, now; if. “It is used often and expresses strong feelings, surprise, hope, expectation, certainty, thus giving vividness depending on its surrounding context.” (Baker) Hinneh generally directs our mind to the text, imploring the reader to give it special attention. In short, the Spirit is trying to arrest our attention! And so hinneh is used as an exclamation of vivid immediacy (e.g., read Ge 6:13)! Hinneh is a marker used to enliven a narrative, to express a change a scene, to emphasize an idea, to call attention to a detail or an important fact or action that follows (Isa 65:17, Ge 17:20, 41:17). The first use of hinneh in Ge 1:29 and second in Ge 1:31 - “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” Hinneh is often used in the idiom “Here I am” in Ge 22:1, 7,11 Ge 27:1,18, Ge 31:11, Ge 46:2 Ex 3:4 1Sa 3:4, 3:16, 12:3, 2Sa 1:7, Isa 52:6, Isa 58:9. Hinneh is used most often to point out people but also to point out things (Ge 31:41, 17:4). God uses hinneh to grab man’s attention before He brings destruction (Ge 6:13, 17). God uses hinneh when He establishes covenants (Ge 9:9, 15:12, 17 [when Jehovah cut the Abrahamic covenant], Ge 17:4, cp Ge

28:13, 15), when He provided a sacrificial substitute for Isaac (foreshadowing His giving us His only Son!) (Ge 22:13). **Hinneh** is translated in the Septuagint with the interjection **idou** (strictly speaking a command in the second person **aorist imperative, middle voice**) a demonstrative particle (used 1377 times in the Septuagint and NT) which is found especially in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Spurgeon reminds us that "**Behold** is a word of wonder; it is intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an ancient sign-board, signifying that there are rich wares within, or like the hands which solid readers have observed in the margin of the older Puritanic books, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation." I would add, **behold** is like a divine highlighter, a divine underlining of an especially striking or important text. It says in effect "Listen up, all ye who would be wise in the ways of Jehovah!"

Oppressors (06231) **ashaq** means to oppress, to extort, to defraud. The root word is concerned with acts of abuse of power or authority, the burdening, trampling, and crushing of those lower in station (half the uses are in the context of poverty). **Ashaq** speaks of harshness or roughness and often embodies use of force or violence. **Ashaq** is used especially of oppression of the disadvantaged members of society causing them to suffer unjust, ill treatment and, in a number of contexts, doing so for monetary gain (1Ch 16:21; Job 10:3; Ps 72:4; 105:14; 119:121, 122; Pr 14:31; 22:16; 28:3; Eccl 4:1; Isa 23:12; 52:4; Jer 7:6; 21:12; Ezek 22:29; Am 4:1; Zec 7:10). The connection between **ashaq** and divine justice is made clear in Ps 103:6.

The use in Proverbs is instructive showing that oppression of the poor affects God, for "He who **oppresses** (Lxx = **sukophanteo** = put pressure on someone for personal gain - Lk 19:8 = "defrauded"; Lk 3:14 = accuse falsely, bring false charges, blackmail; more generally harass, oppress) the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honors Him." (Pr 14:31; cp Pr 22:16, 28:3 which are also translated in Lxx with **sukophanteo**)

Ashaq appears seven times with **gazal** ("rob"; Lev 6:2, Dt 28:29) and five times with **ratsats** which has the basic meaning of crush, break in pieces, or oppress (Dt 28:33, 1Sa 12:3-4, Hos 5:11, Am 4:1). Monetarily oriented meanings are **extort** (defraud) (Lev 6:2), **oppress** (with false balances - Hos 12:7), exploit ("oppress the sojourner" = Ezek 22:29), and **rob** (Mic 2:2). **Ashaq** describes a river raging (Job 40:23), women who are **crushed** (ravished) (Isa 23:12) and a murderer whose conscience is burdened or tormented ("laden with guilt" = Pr 28:17). The psalmist prays for relief from his **oppressors** (Ps 119:121-122).

Comfort (console) (05162) **naham/nacham** is a verb which means to be sorry, to pity, to console oneself, repent, regret, comfort, be comforted, to get revenge for oneself (Ge 27:42, Ezek 5:13). According to the TWOT **nacham** reflects the idea of "breathing deeply" and hence refers to the physical display of one's feelings, such as sorrow, or in this case compassion or comfort. **Nacham** occurs in (Ps 23:4) where David writes "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff, they **comfort** me."

The **Septuagint** renders **nacham** in Ru 2:13 with the Greek verb **parakaleo** (**para** = beside + **kaleo** = call) which has the basic picture of calling someone to oneself (very apropos with Boaz treatment of Ruth!), to call to one's side, to encourage, to instill someone with courage or cheer and so to comfort (used this way in Mt 5:4⁺, cp Lk 16:25⁺).

Ecclesiastes 4:1-8 Emptiness at the Top

In this text Solomon exposes the emptiness of many who make it to the top. This is not a plea for mediocrity. The problem with the people he's talking about soon becomes clear; they have no fear of the Lord. For people like this, tyranny can become a calling card. Since they view people as pawns, it's easy for the powerful to become abusive. Sadly, those whom they oppress often have no one to help or comfort them (v.1). Their lot is so painful Solomon concludes that the dead or unborn are better off than the oppressed. If all of this sounds familiar, it's because these verses capture much of the history of the human race. That's why those who strive for success must also strive for compassion.

Another reason many successful people feel empty is that they see others as competitors to be beaten rather than as companions to be embraced. It isn't easy to make friends under those conditions. That's why those who strive for success must also strive for companionship.

The overachiever can also feel empty because success may bring with it a pack of problems he hadn't expected. For these people, Solomon's advice in verse 6 is worth heeding. That's why those who strive for success must also strive for contentment.

Solomon's final picture (vv. 7-8) is a sad one: a successful person alone with his money. Yet his loneliness and frustration drive him even harder. A person like that needs help! That's why those who strive for success must also strive for cessation—knowing when

enough is enough. (Today in the Word)

Ecclesiastes 4:1-8 The Rat Race

Godliness with contentment is great gain. --1 Timothy 6:6

A sign by the roadside carried this message: "I'm getting sick of the rat race. The rats keep getting bigger and faster." Many men and women, no doubt, feel that way. In spite of amazing advances in technology, people's frustration level seems as high or higher than ever. The core problem is that sinful human nature hasn't changed.

Almost 3,000 years ago, Solomon made three insightful observations about the rat race of life in his day. First, he said that a desire to outdo one's peers was the motive behind much human industriousness, and this was a no-win situation (Eccl. 4:4).

Second, those who dropped out of the rat race became lazy and unproductive. This kind of idleness is foolish and self-destructive (v.5).

Third, Solomon said that people became so obsessed with making money that they didn't form healthy relationships. This made them go through life without purpose or meaning, never satisfied with all they had worked for (v.8).

Remember, "Better a handful with quietness than both hands full, . . . with toil and grasping for the wind" (v.6). To avoid compulsive grasping or self-destructive escapism, put God at the center of your life and be thankful for what He has given you. Then you'll succeed in the rat race of life. —Herbert Vander Lugt (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

The secret of contentment is
To let the Lord supply;
Just do your part and put God first
And on His Word rely.
--DJD

He is rich who is satisfied with what God has given.

Ray Pritchard - - Something New Under the Sun BROKEN HEARTS ON EVERY CORNER

Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter. And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.
Ecclesiastes 4:1-3

I have a friend who serves as a missionary in a third-world country. Not long ago he and his family had to evacuate their home because of political unrest. Rebel forces swept the countryside, denouncing the corruption of the present regime and promising that things would change if they came to power. There would be food for all, good jobs, and economic prosperity. In due course the rebels overthrew the government and became the new leaders. What's it like now? A little bit worse. No one has a job, the average per capita income is less than a dollar a day, and all those rosy promises have been forgotten. To borrow a phrase from American politics, the pigs are still at the trough, only the skinny ones have replaced the fat ones. Otherwise, nothing has changed.

Solomon saw similar oppression and bemoaned the corruption of his day. The poor were so downtrodden that it would be better if they had never been born. Job felt the same way (Job 3:3-10).

Because God is sovereign, we know that He will eventually win the battle with Satan. And God lives outside time; the victory is already won in eternity.

From our perspective the battle rages all around us, and all too often the bad guys seem to be winning. A friend whose marriage broke up because of infidelity has grown enormously in her faith, but one question troubles her mind: Why is her ex-husband doing so well? He seems to be so happy despite his sin. Why doesn't God judge him? It looks to her as if he's gotten away scot-free. I reminded her that every football game has four quarters. It doesn't matter who's winning in the middle of the second quarter or at the end of the third quarter. The only thing that matters is who's winning at the end of the game. I told her that as far as God is concerned, we're still in the second quarter. In the end her ex-husband will reap what he sowed. He will live to regret his sin, and if he doesn't regret it in this life, he certainly will regret it in the next. This principle applies in every situation where we wonder if truth and justice will prevail. God's sovereignty guarantees the ultimate victory of good over evil. It's just that God's timetable and ours aren't the same.

Lord, if I can't change the whole world, help me to improve my little corner. Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- Have you ever personally experienced injustice? What did you do about it? What good things happen when Christians get involved in the problems of others?
- What could you be doing to make a difference?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Exodus 23:1-9; Obadiah 10-15; and Matthew 25:40.

F B Meyer - Ecclesiastes 4:1 Behold, the tears of such as were oppressed.

"Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the morrow comes with years?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,
But that cannot stop their tears.
The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;
The young birds are chirping in the nest;
The young fawns are playing with the shadows;
The young flowers are blowing toward the west—
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly!
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
In the country of the free."

It is a sad, sad world, and perhaps must get sadder yet. It may be that we have not yet reached the darkest hour. Oh the tears of the oppressed; the tiny children; the terror-stricken fugitives from the Turk, the European trader, and the drunken tyrant of the home! Through all the centuries tears have flowed, enough to float a navy.

There need be no difficulty in accounting for them. Our race has elected the service of sin and self. Turning our back on God, for whom we were made, we have turned every one to our own way, and are inheriting the ancient curse of travail, tears, thorns, and death. It is quite true that many suffer innocently and vicariously, because we are members one of another; and by the mysterious arrangement of the Almighty the whole race is bound together by mysterious but indissoluble cords. In Adam all die, all suffer, all sorrow and weep, just as in Christ shall all be made alive. The pain must last, till the Stronger than the strong comes to divide the spoils, and met the captives free.

How comforting it is to realize that God knows our sorrows, puts our tears into his bottle, is afflicted in all our affliction, and bears us on his heart.

Ecclesiastes 4:2 So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living.

- Ec 2:17 9:4-6 Job 3:17-21

DEAD BETTER OFF THAN LIVING!

So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living- At least they would be free of the cruelties of life.

*For him the question was not, "Is there life after death?",
but rather, "Is there life after birth?"*

William MacDonald makes a great point - He was not concerned at the moment with the deeper implications of death—that a person who dies in unbelief is doomed to more severe suffering than the worst oppression on earth. For him the question was not, "Is there life after death?", but rather, "Is there life after birth?"

Ray Stedman - They feel that death would be preferable to what they are going through; they even come to the point where they wish they had never been born. Job felt that way. "Let the day perish wherein I was born" (Job 3:3), he said. "Why did I not die at

birth?" (Job 3)

Ecclesiastes 4:3 But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.

- **better:** Ec 6:3-5 Job 3:10-16 10:18,19 Jer 20:17,18 Mt 24:19 Lu 23:29
- **who:** Ec 1:14 2:17 Ps 55:6-11 Jer 9:2,3

SOLOMON'S CYNICISM BETTER TO NOT BE BORN

But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun - One sure way to avoid injustice under the sun is never to even see the sun! The Teacher is not promoting suicide or denying God's goodness. This is in effect a rhetorical lament meant to expose how oppressive and unjust the fallen world can appear when viewed from an earthly (**under the sun**) perspective alone. In other words, when life is evaluated only by the brokenness that we see in the world, this **evil activity** can seem so overwhelming that never having entered the world at all seems to be preferable.

Both of them refers to the oppressed and the oppressor (vv. 1–2). The Teacher is saying that even death does not seem to resolve the misery, because the living still witness relentless injustice. Thus, in his emotional logic, **never** being born seems **better** than entering a world so saturated with cruelty. The Teacher is using hyperbole (use of exaggeration for rhetorical effect) to communicate the depth of his grief and moral outrage over evil activity. In a sense Solomon is also preparing the ground for his later insistence that meaning, justice, and hope must come from God, not from life **under the sun** alone.

Under the sun is a key Ecclesiastes phrase meaning life viewed from a purely earthly, temporal standpoint, without reference (yet) to God's final justice.

Under the sun - 30x/28v - 2 Sam. 12:12; Eccl. 1:3; Eccl. 1:9; Eccl. 1:14; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:17; Eccl. 2:18; Eccl. 2:19; Eccl. 2:20; Eccl. 2:22; Eccl. 3:16; Eccl. 4:1; Eccl. 4:3; Eccl. 4:7; Eccl. 4:15; Eccl. 5:13; Eccl. 5:18; Eccl. 6:1; Eccl. 6:12; Eccl. 8:9; Eccl. 8:15; Eccl. 8:17; Eccl. 9:3; Eccl. 9:6; Eccl. 9:9; Eccl. 9:11; Eccl. 9:13; Eccl. 10:5

In summary, the Teacher is not saying that non-existence is morally superior. He is not denying God's sovereignty or ultimate justice. He is not advocating despair as the final truth!

I have to end this somewhat dreary passage with a prayer - "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Ro 15:13+) Amen.

G Campbell Morgan - Better than them both did I esteem him which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun. Ec 4.3

In this chapter the Debater describes sociological conditions, as he observed them; and this is his terrible finding. The dead are better than the living; but better than either, is not to have been born at all! It is a terrible conclusion; yet it is a perfectly natural and justifiable one to any who looks only upon conditions of life, and has no interpretation gained in fellowship with God. Glance over life with the Debater. The oppressed are seen, and no one to comfort them. Dexterity in toil is seen, producing envy in the hearts of others. Men are seen gathering wealth and passing into loneliness. Age is seen with its folly and weakness, in spite of position, even that of kingship. The out-look is indeed dark and terrible. Life is not worth while. Death is preferable. Yet better than that, is not to have been. Granted that the things described are not all of life as it may be seen; they are yet so prevalent and so poignant as to make the observer unconscious of brighter facts. The existence of such things at all cancels all other considerations. And the conclusion is warranted. Blot out the things above the sun; deny, or be ignorant of the God Who reigns on high—and life as it is seen is a nightmare and a horror. Every joy becomes a mockery: every pleasure a delusion; every hope a mirage. It is only when we know God, and live in His fear, that we come to understand that all these discords will at last be resolved into perfect harmony. It is only as life is conditioned by spiritual facts and forces that it is delivered from despair.

Ecclesiastes 4:4 I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind.

- **every:** Ge 4:4-8 37:2-11 1Sa 18:8,9,14-16,29,30 Pr 27:4 Mt 27:18 Ac 7:9 Jas 4:5 1Jn 3:12
- **This is:** Ec 4:16 1:14 2:21,26 6:9,11 Ge 37:4,11

MEN'S MOTIVATION FOR THEIR LABOR - RIVALRY

Glenn on Ec 4:4-16 - This section employs the characteristic refrain “meaningless, a chasing after the wind” as a bracketing introductory and concluding formula (vv. 4, 16). This device, called an inclusio, is a common rhetorical feature in biblical literature (cf., e.g., Ps. 8:1, 9). Ecclesiastes 4:4–16 is also characterized by the repeated use of the word “meaningless” (vv. 4, 7–8, 16) and the word “better” (vv. 6, 9, 13) by which Solomon characterized certain motivating incentives of labor as futile and inappropriate.

I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor- TLB = "Then I observed that the basic motive for success is the driving force of envy and jealousy" How true today is this that hard work is motivated by a desire to be better than the Jones next door!

William MacDonald - He saw that the wheel of life was propelled by the competitive spirit. The desire to have better clothes and a more luxurious home—it all seemed so empty and unworthy of men created in God's image and after His likeness. When Michelangelo and Raphael were commissioned to use their artistic talents for the adornment of the Vatican, a deep spirit of rivalry broke out between them. *"Although each had a different job to do, they became so jealous that at last they would not even speak to one another."* Some are more adept at concealing their envy than these geniuses were, but this same attitude of rivalry is at the bottom of much contemporary activity.

Warren Wiersbe - Disgusted with what he saw in the “halls of justice,” the king went down to the marketplace to watch the various laborers at work. Surely he would not be disappointed there, for honest toil is a gift from God. Even Adam had work to do in the Garden (Gen. 2:15), and our Lord was a carpenter when He was here on earth (Mark 6:3). Solomon considered four different kinds of men. The first two were the industrious man and the idle man. It was natural for Solomon first to find a laborer who was working hard. For, after all, had not the king extolled the virtues of hard work in the book of Proverbs? The man was not only busy, but he was skillful in his work and competent in all he did. He had mastered the techniques of his trade. Solomon moved from one extreme to the other and began to study a man who had no ambition at all. Perhaps the king could learn about life by examining the antithesis, the way scientists study cold to better understand heat. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

*"I've tried everything that life has to offer, but all I see is
one guy trying to outdo another in a futile attempt at happiness."*

--A modern cynic

This too is vanity ([hebel](#) - fleeting, insubstantial, short-lived; [Lxx](#) - [mataiotes](#) - emptiness, nothingness, purposelessness) **and striving after wind** - Emptiness, futility and trying to grasp wind with our hands!

Ray Stedman - How accurately this records what is happening in human history! People really do not want things, they want to be admired for the things they have. What they want is not the new car itself, but to hear their neighbors say, "How lucky you are to have such a beautiful car!" That is what people want -- to be the center, the focus of attention....The drive to be admired is the true objective of life. But, he says, this too "is vanity and a striving after wind."

Oswald Chambers - There is a rivalry between men, and we have made it a good thing; we have made ambition and competition the very essence of civilised life. No wonder there is no room for Jesus Christ, and no room for the Bible. We are all so scientifically orthodox nowadays, so materialistic and certain that rationalism is the basis of things, that we make the Bible out to be the most revolutionary, unorthodox and heretical of books. Jesus Christ echoes Solomon's attitude: "For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he posseseth." ([Shade of His Hand](#))

William Barrick ([Ecclesiastes 4 Commentary](#)) - **Envy, jealousy, covetousness, and greed all serve to motivate people to work with fervor and through long hours.** Jealousy carries with it a positive connotation only in regard to the relationship between God and His people and the marital relationship.⁷ Jealousy or envy divides families (Gen 30:1; 37:11), kills (Job 5:2), harasses (Isa 11:13), and produces anger (Prov 6:34), “rotteness to the bones” (perhaps illness, Prov 14:30), and hatred (Ezek 35:11). One should not envy a violent person (Prov 3:31) or sinners (Prov 23:17). No wonder the Scripture describes this sort of labor or work as “evil” (Ec 4:3). Such work displays a dog-eat-dog attitude wherein a person seeks to get ahead, even if he or she must step on colleagues in their climb to the top of the corporate ladder. In Walter Kaiser's examination of this passage, he acknowledges that “men can be as cruel and inhuman to each other in unnecessary competition as they can be in oppression”⁸ It is more popular to criticize corporate greed and political oppression than to recognize that such great injustices originate with the envy and jealousy that too often motivates a person in his or her own drive to succeed at any cost.

7 Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 187. See Exod 20:5; 34:14; Num 5:14–30; 25:11, 13; Song of Sol 8:6; Zech 1:14; 8:2; cp. 2 Cor 11:2.

8 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Ecclesiastes: Total Life*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 72.

Charles Bridges How vividly Solomon draws the picture of selfishness in all its features! A man pursues a right work. Yet his neighbour envies his rectitude. His own character suffers by comparison with him. Hence the revolt. Thus, whichever side of the world we look, it presents the same face of vanity—the same result—vexation of spirit. ‘

A man that hath no virtue in himself’—observes our great English philosopher—‘ever envieth virtue in others; for men's minds will either feed upon their own good, or upon others' evil. And who wanteth the one will prey upon the other; and whoso is out of hope to attain to another's virtue, will seek to come at even hand by depressing another's fortune.’ (Lord Bacon's Essays, ix)

This is the “evil eye,” (See Mark 7:22) offended with the clear shining light. The better the work, the more is the man hated by those who have no heart to imitate him. (Ge 4:8, with 1Jn, 3:11, 12. Also Da, 6:4, 5. This last example as Abp. Whately seems to admit contradicts Lord Bacon's observation—that ‘persons of eminent virtue, when they are advanced, are less envied.’) Thus even godliness becomes a source of evil. If our godliness “condemn the world,” we must expect to be hated by the world. Unbending integrity was the only charge brought against Aristides. And in an infinitely higher perfection of example, the only explanation of unprovoked and murderous cruelty, was—that, irritated by his popularity, “they had delivered him for envy.” (Mark, 15:10.) This is truly a fiendish passion—hating good for goodness' sake. It is like “the star Wormwood,” poisoning the fountains around. (Rev. 8:10, 11.) It works often under a subtle but plausible cover. God's work must be done. But we must be the doers of it. The thought is intolerable, that another and more honourable than ourselves should have the praise. We must throw something into the balance to deprecate his fair name, and to preserve the glory of our dearest idol—self. ‘How contrary a state’—as Bp. Taylor beautifully observes—to the felicities and actions of heaven, where every star increases the light of the other, and the multitude of guests at the supper of the Lamb makes the eternal meal more festival! (Holy Living, chap. iv. sect. 8)

Hard indeed is it to work with singleness for our Master's name—‘labouring’—as Dr. Arnold nobly expressed it on his death-bed—‘to do God's will; yet not anxious that it should be done by me, rather than by others.’ (Stanley's Life, ii. 322. ‘Be content that thy brother should be employed, and thou laid by as unprofitable; his sentence approved, thine rejected; he be preferred, and thou fixed in a low employment.’—Bp. Taylor, Holy Living, chap. ii. sect. 4.) Good old Fuller's prayers are much to the point—

‘Dispossess me, Lord, of this bad spirit, and turn my envy into holy emulation. Let me labour to exceed those in pains, who excel me in parts. Let me feed, and foster, and nourish, and cherish the graces in others, honouring their persons, praising their parts, and glorifying thy name, who hath given such gifts unto them.’

The true power of the Gospel can alone root out this hateful principle. If there be a living union with Christ, will not his honour be our joy, by whomsoever it be advanced? If there be a true communion with the body, the prosperity of one member will be the joy of the whole. (1 Cor. 12:26; Eph. 4:16.) ‘One finger envieth not another, that weareth a gold ring, as taking it for an ornament of the whole hand—yea, of the whole body.’ (Cotton)

Ah! Christian—have not you often detected this lust in yourself—yea—even after the Lord has had mercy upon you? Then surely sorrow and shame will be your lot. And many a quickening desire will be stirred up for the world, where it shall never be known more. For “into that place shall not in any wise enter anything that defileth.” (Rev. 21:27.)

Vanity (futility, idols, breath, delusion, worthless, emptiness) (01892) **hebel** means breath, vapor, vanity, emptiness, meaninglessness; idols. Hebel commonly has the figurative use of that which is evanescent and unstable. The first OT use refers to idols (Dt 32:21; cf 1 Ki 16:13, 26, Jer 8:19; Jeremiah 10:8, 15; Jer 14:22 Jer 51:18; Jonah 2:9; Ps 31:6), a fitting word picture for the worthlessness of idols! **Hebel** refers to breath because of its transitory fleeting character, as in Job's figurative use “my days are but a **breath**.” (Job 7:16, cf similar idea Ps 39:5, 6, 11; Ps 62:9; Ps 78:33 where hebel parallels behālā from root bāhal “to hasten”: Ps 94:11; Ps 144:4) **Hebel** “generally appears in contexts where it is used as a simile emphasizing the transitory state of an object, never as descriptive of the biological function. A prime example would be “Humanity is like a breath (Ps. 144:4). Not only is breath ethereal and of short duration, but all things which breathe will die.” (Gilbrant)

Michael Eaton adds **Hebel** means (i) brevity and unsubstantiality, emptiness (NEB), spelt out in Job 7 where the ‘vanity’ (Job 7:16, Heb.) of man's life is a ‘breath’ (Job 7:7), an evaporating cloud (Job 7:9), soon to be ended (Job 7:8) and return no more (Job 7:9f.); (ii) unreliability, frailty, found also in Psalm 62 where God, a ‘Rock’ and a ‘high tower’ (Ps 62:6), is compared with man who is ‘vanity’ (Ps 62:9), a ‘leaning wall’ and a ‘tottering fence’ (Ps 62:3); (iii) futility, as in Job 9:29 (Heb.), where ‘in vanity’ means ‘to no effect’; (iv) deceit

(cf. Jer. 16:19; Zech. 10:2). Ecclesiastes includes each of these emphases. All is untrustworthy, unsubstantial; no endeavour will in itself bring permanent satisfaction; the greatest joys are fleeting. Between Eccl 1:2 and Eccl 12:8 the Preacher will echo this key statement about thirty times, showing that his book is in fact its exposition. Vanity characterizes all human activity (Eccl 1:14; 2:11): joy (Eccl 2:1) and frustration (Eccl 4:4, 7-8; 5:10) alike, life (Eccl 2:17; 6:12; 9:9), youth (Eccl 11:10) and death (Eccl 3:19; 11:8), the destinies of wise and foolish (Eccl 2:15, 19), diligent and idle (Eccl 2:21, 23, 26). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes : an introduction and commentary page 56](#))

Vine's summary of **hebel** - **First**, the word represents human "breath" as a transitory thing: "I loathe it; I would not live always: let me alone; for my days are vanity [literally, but a breath] (Job 7:16). **Second**, hebel means something meaningless and purposeless: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2). **Third**, this word signifies an "idol," which is unsubstantial, worthless, and vain: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities ..." (Dt. 32:21, the first occurrence). See SPIRIT usage notes.

Warren Baker adds that **hebel** "refers to the vanity and ultimate emptiness and meaninglessness of all things in this life, whether they seem good or bad (Eccl. 1:2, 14; 2:11, 15, 3:19; 4:4, 7, 8; 5:7; 6:2, 4, 9; 7:6, 15; 8:10; 9:9; 11:8). Combined with itself in the plural, it means **absolute meaninglessness** (Eccl. 1:2). Idols and the vain religious customs associated with them are all delusions (Jer. 10:3, 15). It denotes an empty, vain life (Eccl. 6:12). Used with the verb *hābal*, it means to carry out vain talk or action or what is empty (Job 27:12). As an adverb, it means to talk in vain, emptily (Job 35:16). To walk after **hebel** means to go after or follow vanity (2 Ki. 17:15; Jer. 2:5). Anything obtained through evil is vain, such as wealth (Prov. 13:11)." (Borrow Complete Word Study Dictionary– Old Testament)

Victor Hamilton (See TWOT) on "the cluster of references (of hebel) found in Ecclesiastes (thirty-six). These may be grouped into several subdivisions. First are those passages in which the author states his inability to find fulfillment in work, both in his failure to be creative and in his lack of control over the privilege of free disposition of his possessions; this is "vanity": Eccl 2:11, 19, 21, 23; Eccles. 4:4, 8; Eccles. 6:2. Second are those verses in which the author struggles with the idea that the connection between sin and judgment, righteousness and final deliverance is not always direct or obvious. This is an anomaly about life and it is vanity": Eccles. 2:15; Eccles. 6:7-9; Eccles. 8:10-14. The meaning of hebel here would be "senseless." Thirdly are those verses in which the author laments the shortness of life; this is vanity": Eccles. 3:19; Eccles. 6:12; Eccles. 11:8, 10. Life, in its quality, is "empty" or "vacuous" (and thus unsubstantial), and in its quantity is "transitory." Rather than the above observations being final conclusions about life by the author of Ecclesiastes, perhaps they reveal something of his method and his concealed premise. He may be attempting to demonstrate man's inability to find meaning to life unaided by divine revelation and interruption. This solo quest will always end in futility.

HEBEL - 67X/64V - **breath(5), delusion(2), emptily(1), emptiness(2), fleeting(2), fraud(1), futile(1), futility(13), idols(7), mere breath(2), nothing(1), useless(1), vain(3), vainly(1), vanity(19), vanity of vanities(3), vapor(1), worthless(2).** Deut. 32:21; 1 Ki. 16:13; 1 Ki. 16:26; 2 Ki. 17:15; Job 7:16; Job 9:29; Job 21:34; Job 27:12; Job 35:16; Ps. 31:6; Ps. 39:5; Ps. 39:6; Ps. 39:11; Ps. 62:9; Ps. 78:33; Ps. 94:11; Ps. 144:4; Prov. 13:11; Prov. 21:6; Prov. 31:30;

Eccl. 1:2; Eccl. 1:14; Eccl. 2:1; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:15; Eccl. 2:17; Eccl. 2:19; Eccl. 2:21; Eccl. 2:23; Eccl. 2:26; Eccl. 3:19; Eccl. 4:4; Eccl. 4:7; Eccl. 4:8; Eccl. 4:16; Eccl. 5:7; Eccl. 5:10; Eccl. 6:2; Eccl. 6:4; Eccl. 6:9; Eccl. 6:11; Eccl. 6:12; Eccl. 7:6; Eccl. 7:15; Eccl. 8:10; Eccl. 8:14; Eccl. 9:9; Eccl. 11:8; Eccl. 11:10; Eccl. 12:8;

Isa. 30:7; Isa. 49:4; Isa. 57:13; Jer. 2:5; Jer. 8:19; Jer. 10:3; Jer. 10:8; Jer. 10:15; Jer. 14:22; Jer. 16:19; Jer. 51:18; Lam. 4:17; Jon. 2:8; Zech. 10:2

Deuteronomy 32:21_± 'They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their **IDOLS** (no god = ESV, so-called gods = CSB, false gods = NET)(hebel; [Lxx](#) - [eidolon](#)). So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,

And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. The fool folds his hands and ruins himself. Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind. Ecclesiastes 4:4-6

Over three hundred years ago Jeremiah Burroughs penned a book that has become a Christian classic. The title tells the whole story: The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment. He argues that true contentment involves accepting what God has given you with a grateful heart and at the same time refusing to accept the status quo. Believers are to be contented and dissatisfied at the same time.

This is a delicate balance not easy to find and even harder to keep. Solomon warns against going to extremes. On one hand envy of others drives so much of what we do. We see what they have and want to have it—and more besides. This drives some people to become workaholics, living to work instead of working to live. On the other hand it's easy to sit back, fold your hands, take it easy, and watch the world go by. The workaholic burns himself out while the lazy fool ruins himself—and his family and friends who try to pick up the pieces.

Much to be preferred is the moderation of verse 6. Better to have a little money in the bank and peace at home than to have a million dollars and a date in divorce court.

A hard-driving, Type A corporate attorney happened to see a commercial fisherman he knew from church one afternoon, legs dangling off the pier as he helped his two young sons catch crabs. "Why aren't you out there fishing?" he asked.

"Because I've caught enough fish for today," said the fisherman. "Why don't you catch more fish than you need?"

"What would I do with them?" responded the fisherman.

"You could earn more money and buy a better boat so you could go deeper and catch more fish. Then you could buy a fleet of boats. Soon you'd be rich like me."

"What would I do then?"

"You could sit down and enjoy life."

"What do you think I'm doing now?" the fisherman replied.

This is not an argument in favor of indolence but a call for balanced living. The wise person realizes that some things matter more than other things, that your career is not the measure of your self-worth, that having more money can't replace the joy of spending time with people you love.

Contentment means that you have everything you need right now. If you needed more, God would give it to you. Work hard, but don't make work your god. When you want what you already have, you've discovered the rare jewel of contentment.

Father, I praise You that I have everything I need for this moment. Teach me to enjoy what I already have.
Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- Do you agree that you already have everything you need for the present moment? Are you satisfied with how God has treated you lately?
- What does it mean to be content and yet dissatisfied at the same time?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Psalm 37:16-19; Proverbs 30:7-9; and Hebrews 13:5.

Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.

KJV Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool folds his hands And consumes his own flesh.

BGT Ecclesiastes 4:5 φρων περι λαβεν τ ο χε ρας α το κα φαγεν τ ο σ ρκας α το

LXE Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool folds his hands together, and eats his own flesh.

NET Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool folds his hands and does no work, so he has nothing to eat but his own flesh.

CSB Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool folds his arms and consumes his own flesh.

ESV Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.

NIV Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool folds his hands and ruins himself.

NLT Ecclesiastes 4:5 "Fools fold their idle hands, leading them to ruin."

YLT Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool is clasping his hands, and eating his own flesh:

NJB Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool folds his arms and eats his own flesh away.

NRS Ecclesiastes 4:5 Fools fold their hands and consume their own flesh.

NAB Ecclesiastes 4:5 "The fool folds his arms and consumes his own flesh"--

GWN Ecclesiastes 4:5 A fool folds his hands and wastes away.

BBE Ecclesiastes 4:5 The foolish man, folding his hands, takes the flesh of his body for food.

RSV Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool folds his hands, and eats his own flesh.

ASV Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.

DBY Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.

- **fool:** Pr 6:10,11 12:27 13:4 20:4 24:33,34
- **consumes his own flesh** Job 13:14 Pr 11:17 Isa 9:20

Related Passages:

Proverbs 6:10 "A little sleep, a little slumber, **A little folding of the hands to rest**"–

Proverbs 24:33 "A little sleep, a little slumber, **A little folding of the hands to rest**,"

Proverbs 18:9 He also who is slack in his work Is brother to him who destroys.

Proverbs 19:15 Laziness casts into a deep sleep, And an idle man will suffer hunger.

FOLDING OF HANDS YIELDS EMPTY STOMACH

The fool ([kesil](#); Lxx - [aphron](#)) **folds his hands and consumes his own flesh** -(NIV - "ruins himself"; NET - "so he has nothing to eat but his own flesh"; TLB = "The fool won't work and almost starves") First note this is a "mini-definition" of a **fool** ([kesil](#)), a word Solomon uses 38x in Proverbs and 15x in Ecclesiastes. So what is the description of a fool? In context he is one who seeks to escape the "rat race" Solomon has just described. Unfortunately "folds his hands" pictures him as not using his hands and by extension not working. In short, he is lazy. What is the consequence? He starves which is the picture of he metaphor **consumes his own flesh**. However some suggest this refers to cannibalizes himself!

William Barrick ([Ecclesiastes 4 Commentary](#)) - **Solomon constructs a contrast between Eccl 4:4, 5.** The avaricious individual of Ec 4:4 displays too much ambition and too little contentment, whereas the indolent individual of Ec 4:5 exhibits too little ambition and excessive contentment.⁹ **Folding the hands** appears elsewhere in Proverbs 6:10 and Pr 24:33 depicting the slumber of a lazy person. Lying on their beds, they fold their hands over their chest or bosom as they sleep. Biblical wisdom writers condemn laziness and associate the characteristic with fools (Prov 6:9; 10:26; 12:27; 13:4; 15:19; 19:15, 24; 20:4; 21:25; Pr 22:13; 24:30; 26:14, 16; cp. Matt 25:24–30). Commentators understand "**consumes his own flesh**" (Eccl 4:5) in at least three different ways: (1) self-cannibalism speaking metaphorically of self-destruction,¹⁰ (2) "still has his meat to eat"¹¹, and (3) reducing oneself to poverty.¹² The first of these appears to be most consistent with the imagery and the context.

9 Daniel J. Estes, Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 322.

10 Robert Gordis, *Koheleth—The Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 241.

11 Roland Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, WBC 23A (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 31.

12 George Aaron Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes*, ICC (1908;

Ray Stedman - Sometimes, however, when people become aware of this they flip over to the opposite extreme: they drop out of society, they get out of the rat race, they go on relief and let the government support them. We saw a lot of that kind of reaction here in California ten years ago. Young people, particularly, were then saying, "We don't want to be a part of the rat race any more; we don't want to strive to be admired. We'll drop out of society." But that is not the answer either....Many young people who were part of the youth revolution, the counter culture society of a few years ago, have found this to be true: that when you sit in idleness you devour yourself, your resources disappear, your self respect vanishes. They had to learn the painful lesson that the only way to maintain themselves, even physically, let alone psychologically, was to go to work and stop devouring themselves.

Oswald Chambers - "The best thing to do is to be a Bohemian and have nothing to do with civilised life; to live from hand to mouth and not do a hand's turn." This has been a cult in every age of civilised life. We have seen it in our own day in Charles Wagner * and his plea for a simple life, and in Walt Whitman and Thoreau, who advocated the simple life on a higher line. When a man is fed up with a certain line of things, he revolts and goes to the opposite extreme. To-day tyranny and oppression have eaten into men's sense of justice, and they have revolted and gone to the other extreme. ([Shade of His Hand](#))

Charles Bridges on Ec 4:5-6 - Another picture of vanity! The wise man looks from one scene to another—oppression—envy—now idleness. What a vast fertility of excuses does the great enemy suggest! In the business of daily life how many stumbling-blocks does he put in the way! The sluggard—wasting his precious time and opportunity—mistaking idleness for quietness—heaping misery upon himself—bears the stamp of a **fool**. And well does he deserve his name. He folds his hands together (Prov. 6:9, 10; 24:30–33) with heartless indifference, as if *he would rather eat his very flesh from his bones, than put forth any troublesome exertion* And yet an excuse was ready at hand. Above him he saw the tyranny of the oppressor. Many on his own level grudged their neighbour his happiness. And therefore for himself he deems a little with ease to be far better than much with toil and trouble. Nothing is to be gained without travail. And yet the fruit of successful travail becomes the object of envy. Far better therefore he thinks an handful with quietness, than both hands filled with the heavy tax of vexation of spirit.¹

The **fool** thus 'does nothing, because others do ill.'² And certainly no one has so little enjoyment of life, as he who is doing nothing in life. As Dr. Barrow asks, when rebuking his idle gentleman—"What title can he have to happiness? What capacity thereof? What reward can he claim? What comfort can he feel? To what temptations he is exposed! What guilt will he incur! Idleness indeed places a man out of God's order. It should therefore have no place in God's fair creation.'² Work is at once the substance and the privilege of our service. A thousand witnesses will rise up against the sluggard's excuse—"There is a lion without; I shall be slain in the streets." (Prov. 22:13.)

In our general calling and our daily course—"the strictest imprisonment is far more tolerable, than being under restraint by a lazy humour from profitable employment. This enchaineth a man hand and foot with more than iron fetters. This is beyond any imprisonment. It is the very entombment of a man, quite in effect sequestering him from the world, or debarring him from any valuable concerns therein."³

But this **folding of the hands** together—what a deadly hindrance is it in the ways of God! A life of ease can never be a life of happiness, or the pathway to heaven. (See Matt. 16:24; 2 Tim. 2:3) Trifling indulgences greatly enervate the soul. 'A despicable indulgence in lying in bed'—writes the heavenly Martyn in his early course—"gave me such a view of the softness of my character, that I resolved upon my knees to live a life of more self-denial. The tone and vigour of my mind rose rapidly. All those duties, from which I usually shrink, seemed recreations.' Taking a high standard of example, what say we to the quickening example of Him, who, after a Sabbath of ceaseless labour, "in the morning rising up a great while before day, went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed?" (Mark 1:35.) To cultivate habits of self-denial—to mind our work more than our pleasure, is of incalculable moment. Blessed, indeed, is the toil in such a service for such a Master! The crown and the kingdom brighten all. In the most fainting discouragement the effort to take one forward step—or even to resist one backward step—when made under the sense of the infinite preciousness of the favour of God, and the constraining love of Christ—will never be made in vain. Power will be given and felt to cut the way through every difficulty, and to live in all the high enjoyment of our privileged service.

Fool ([03684](#)) **kesil** is a stupid fellow, a morally insensitive dullard, whether it be in spiritual, intellectual, or moral matters. These are stupid people who are totally confident in own wisdom, thinking they have it all figured out without God's assistance. **Swanson** adds that **kesil** refers to (1) foolishness, stupidity, insolence, i.e., the state of being in complete lack of understanding, implying rebellion ([Pr 10:1](#)); (2) fool, insolent person, i.e., one completely lacking understanding, implying to be a rebel against standard or person [Pr 10:18](#).

Vine - The **kesil** is "insolent" in religion and "stupid or dull" in wise living (living out a religion he professes)....They have knowledge of God but do not properly evaluate or understand what they know...(In Proverbs the fool) rejects the claims and teachings of wisdom. However, in the Bible wisdom is the practical

outworking of one's religion. Therefore, even in these contexts there is a clear connotation of insolence in religion. ([Vine's Expository Dictionary](#))

KESIL - 69V - fool(35), fool's(2), foolish(6), foolish man's(1), fools(23), stupid(1), stupid man(1), stupid ones(1). Ps. 49:10; Ps. 92:6; Ps. 94:8; Prov. 1:22; Prov. 1:32; Prov. 3:35; Prov. 8:5; Prov. 10:1; Prov. 10:18; Prov. 10:23; Prov. 12:23; Prov. 13:16; Prov. 13:19; Prov. 13:20; Prov. 14:7; Prov. 14:8; Prov. 14:16; Prov. 14:24; Prov. 14:33; Prov. 15:2; Prov. 15:7; Prov. 15:14; Prov. 15:20; Prov. 17:10; Prov. 17:12; Prov. 17:16; Prov. 17:21; Prov. 17:24; Prov. 17:25; Prov. 18:2; Prov. 18:6; Prov. 18:7; Prov. 19:1; Prov. 19:10; Prov. 19:13; Prov. 19:29; Prov. 21:20; Prov. 23:9; Prov. 26:1; Prov. 26:3; Prov. 26:4; Prov. 26:5; Prov. 26:6; Prov. 26:7; Prov. 26:8; Prov. 26:9; Prov. 26:10; Prov. 26:11; Prov. 26:12; Prov. 28:26; Prov. 29:11; Prov. 29:20; Eccl. 2:14; Eccl. 2:15; Eccl. 2:16; Eccl. 4:5; Eccl. 4:13; Eccl. 5:1; Eccl. 5:3; Eccl. 5:4; Eccl. 6:8; Eccl. 7:4; Eccl. 7:5; Eccl. 7:6; Eccl. 7:9; Eccl. 9:17; Eccl. 10:2; Eccl. 10:12; Eccl. 10:15

Read through the uses of kesil in Proverbs for a more complete Biblical understanding of a **fool** - e.g., they are complacent, they will be destroyed, etc (Pr 1:32). Then read [Torrey's description of Fools](#)

Ecclesiastes 4:6 One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.

KJV Ecclesiastes 4:6 Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 4:6 Better a handful with quietness Than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind.

BGT Ecclesiastes 4:6 γαθ ν πλ ρωμα δρακ σ ναπα σεως π ρ πλ ρωμα δ ο δρακ ν μ χθου κα προαιρ σεως πνε ματος

LXE Ecclesiastes 4:6 Better is a handful of rest than two handfuls of trouble and waywardness of spirit.

NET Ecclesiastes 4:6 Better is one handful with some rest than two hands full of toil and chasing the wind.

CSB Ecclesiastes 4:6 Better one handful with rest than two handfuls with effort and a pursuit of the wind.

ESV Ecclesiastes 4:6 Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

NIV Ecclesiastes 4:6 Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.

NLT Ecclesiastes 4:6 And yet, "Better to have one handful with quietness than two handfuls with hard work and chasing the wind."

YLT Ecclesiastes 4:6 'Better is a handful with quietness, than two handfuls with labour and vexation of spirit.'

NJB Ecclesiastes 4:6 Better one hand full of repose than two hands full of achievements to chase after the wind.

NRS Ecclesiastes 4:6 Better is a handful with quiet than two handfuls with toil, and a chasing after wind.

NAB Ecclesiastes 4:6 Better is one handful with tranquility than two with toil and a chase after wind!

GWN Ecclesiastes 4:6 One handful of peace and quiet is better than two handfuls of hard work and of trying to catch the wind.

BBE Ecclesiastes 4:6 One hand full of rest is better than two hands full of trouble and desire for wind.

■ Ps 37:16 Pr 15:16,17 Pr 16:8 17:1

Related Passages:

Proverbs 15:16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD Than great treasure and turmoil with it.

Proverbs 17:1 Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it Than a house full of feasting with strife.

1 Timothy 6:6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.

THAN MORE WITH STRIFE

One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor([05999](#)) **amal** and **striving after wind** - **NLT** = "Better to have one handful with quietness than two handfuls with hard work and chasing the wind." This verse compares two ways of living a life of moderation and contentment ("one hand full of rest") a life of greedy ambition and restless toil ("two fists full of labor and striving"). Solomon is contrasting the peace of simplicity with the burden of endless striving. It's better to have less with peace than more with anxiety.

*In a world that tells you to "go bigger" and "get more,"
Solomon reminds us: peace matters more than possession.*

Picture two people side-by-side: one with open palm holding a peaceful dove, the other clutching at smoke with both fists, surrounded by chaos.

Warren Wiersbe - The third man Solomon observed, the integrated man, was a man whose life was balanced: He was productive in his work, but he was also careful to take time for quietness. He did not run in the rat race, but neither did he try to run away from the normal responsibilities of life. A 1989 Harris survey revealed that the amount of leisure time enjoyed by the average American had shrunk 37 percent from 1973. This suggests that fewer people know how to keep life in balance. They are caught in the rat race and don't know how to escape. Why have both hands full of profit if that profit costs you your peace of mind and possibly your health? Better to have gain in one hand and quietness in the other. When a heart is controlled by envy and rivalry, life becomes one battle after another (James 3:13–4:4, and see Prov. 15:16). Paul's instructions about money in 1 Timothy 6 is applicable here, especially verse 6, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

*Contentment can exist where the individual
actually possesses fewer material goods, but finds satisfying rest*

William Barrick ([Ecclesiastes 4 Commentary](#)) - By means of yet another proverb, the writer of Ecclesiastes expresses the truth that contentment can exist where the individual actually possesses fewer material goods, but finds satisfying rest (Eccl 4:6). "**Fists**" consists of a word that indicates the cupping of the hands to be able "to take as much as possible" ([Eaton, Ecclesiastes, 93](#); Barton, Ecclesiastes, 115.) (see Ex 9:8; Lev 16:12; Prov 30:4; Ezek 10:2, 7). In other words, **preoccupation with the pursuit of wealth is as evil as laziness**. Solomon declared in Psalm 127:2,

It is vain for you to rise up early,
To retire late,
To eat the bread of painful labors;
For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.

Elsewhere, he binds contentment to the believer's relationship to the Lord (Prov 15:16; 16:8) and to harmonious and loving relationships with others (Prov 15:17).

Ray Stedman on **one hand full of rest is better**- It would be much better, says the Searcher, to lower your expectations and choose a less ambitious lifestyle.

THOUGHT - Is your life a carbon copy of the bestseller Tyranny of the Urgent? Consider pursuit of margin over pursuit of treasure. You don't need to fill every moment with toil. Release yourself from the pressure to prove your worth by productivity or wealth. Value rest, family, worship, and peace as treasures richer than overtime pay. Are you grasping the wind with both hands, or living with one hand content with rest?

Lord, help me to release my clenched fists.
Teach me to live with one hand open —
trusting Your provision, cherishing Your peace,
and choosing rest over relentless pursuit.
May my labor be fruitful, not frantic.
May I seek You more than I strive for gain.

Greedy Grasping

Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind. Ecclesiastes 4:6

Today's Scripture & Insight : Ecclesiastes 4:4–8

In the ancient fable The Boy and the Filberts (Nuts), a boy sticks his hand into a jar of nuts and grabs a great fistful. But his hand is so full that it gets stuck in the jar. Unwilling to lose even a little of his bounty, the boy begins to weep. Eventually, he's counseled to

let go of some of the nuts so the jar will let go of his hand. Greed can be a hard boss.

The wise teacher of Ecclesiastes illustrates this moral with a lesson on hands and what they say about us. He compared and contrasted the lazy with the greedy when he wrote: "Fools fold their hands and ruin themselves. Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind" (4:5-6). While the lazy procrastinate until they're ruined, those who pursue wealth come to realize their efforts are "meaningless—a miserable business!" (v. 8).

According to the teacher, the desired state is to relax from the toil of greedy grasping in order to find contentment in what truly belongs to us. For that which is ours will always remain. As Jesus said, "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul" (Mark 8:36). By: Remi Oyedele (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

What are you driven to pursue and grasp? How can you apply the wise words of Ecclesiastes in order to find tranquility?

God, thank You for Your provision and faithful presence in my life. Help me to live in a contented way, exhibiting true gratefulness to You.

Ecclesiastes 4:7 Then I looked again at vanity under the sun.

- Ec 4:1 Ps 78:33 Zec 1:6

Then I looked again at vanity (*hebel* - fleeting, insubstantial, short-lived; *Lxx* - *mataiotes* - emptiness, nothingness, purposelessness) **under the sun** - This is Solomon's third reference to observing (I looked - Ec 4:1, I have seen - Ec 4:4).

William Barrick ([Ecclesiastes 4 Commentary](#)) - Whereas Eccl 4:1-3 speak of no comforter and Eccl 4:4-6 imply no rest, Eccl 4:7-12 dwell on the concept of no companion. (Kaiser, Ecclesiastes: Total Life, 73.)

Charles Bridges on Ec 4:7-8 - Solomon's mind was in constant exercise. We find him returning from one side to another, only to fasten upon some new illustration of this world's vanity. The slothful fool sits with his folded hands—preferring quietness at any cost. Contrasted with him, we have the covetous fool—full of active energy. He has chosen money for his God. The miser—how well does he deserve his name! the wretched slave of Mammon, grown old as a toiling, scraping, griping drudge! He cannot plead in excuse the necessary claims of a large family. He is alone, and there is not a second; yea—he hath neither child nor brother. Yet so long as he can add one farthing to his hoard, he cannot bear the thought of giving up. There is no end of his labour. Labour indeed it is, without rest or satisfaction, however he may heap up his treasure. His eye is not satisfied with riches. Still he craves for more. The less need, the more raking. 'He hath enough for his back, his calling, the decency of his state and condition; but he hath not enough for his eye.'¹ All is sacrificed—even to the bereaving his soul of common good. And for whom all this labour? "He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them." (Ps. 39:6.) Illustrations from real life are not wanting: The Great Marlborough—scraping together a fortune of a million and a half—would walk through the rain at night to save sixpence! bereaving himself of good—for whom? for a family, whom he had always regarded as his enemies.²

But it is not only the miser. Here also is the man that spends his money upon himself, and upon his own selfish gratifications, forgetting its true use and responsibility. When once we acknowledge the bond—"Ye are not your own" (1 Cor. 6:19)—readily shall we add—Neither is our silver or our gold our own, but God's; worthless—worse than worthless; as a selfish possession; an acceptable gift, when consecrated to the service of God and his Church.

The man of covetousness would keep his money within his last grasp. No other satisfaction can he realize. But all this is vanity, and a sore travail. Never has he soberly calculated profit and loss. Comfort, peace, usefulness, and—what is infinitely more important—the interests of the immortal soul—all is sacrificed to this mean and sordid lust. A perishing sinner—his shadowy portion snatched from him; and his state for eternity irremediable misery—such is the picture! His call is sudden in the midst of all his purposes of aggrandizement. He has "received his good things." All is now infinite and unchangeable ruin. "So is he"—adds our Divine Instructor—"that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God." (Luke, 12:18-21; 16:25.) 'Envy thou not the fool's paradise here, that has hell at the end of it.'¹ Now mark the contrast—The child of God in poverty, yet in possession of the Gospel treasure. "As having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:10)—enriched and honoured for both worlds—partaker with his Lord of the kingdom. Reader—be sure that this is thy joy—thy portion—first in thine eye and in thy heart.

Ecclesiastes 4:8 There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, "And for whom am I laboring and

depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.

- one: Ec 4:9-12 Ge 2:18 Isa 56:3-5
- he hath: Ge 15:2,3
- no: Isa 5:8
- is his: Ec 1:8 5:10 Pr 27:20 Hab 2:5-9 1Jn 2:16
- For: Ps 39:6 Isa 44:19,20 Lu 12:20
- it is: Ec 1:13 2:23 Isa 55:2 Mt 11:28

[Compare Pix of Lone Ranger with Tonto](#)

THE LONE RANGER WITHOUT TONTO

[Tonto](#) is a fictional character; he is the Native American companion of the [Lone Ranger](#), a popular American Western character.

There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother- Literal = "YLT There is one, and there is not a second; even son or brother he hath not, and there is no end to all his labour! His eye also is not satisfied with riches, and he saith not, 'For whom am I labouring and bereaving my soul of good?' This also is vanity, it is a sad travail." This man is completely alone — he has no family, no heirs, no companions. In Hebrew culture, this was especially tragic, since legacy and inheritance were highly valued. His theme song could have been "[One is the loneliest number](#)."

*God advocates companionship
over solo lives.*

yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches Despite his isolation, he works endlessly. He's a workaholic, perhaps accumulating wealth with no real purpose. He is driven by greed or ambition, always craving more, but never content. "**Eyes not satisfied**" is a Hebrew idiom for insatiable desire (cf. Proverbs 27:20).

Warren Wiersbe - Solomon noticed a solitary man, very hard at work, so he went to question him. The king discovered that the man had no relatives or partners to help him in his business, nor did he desire any help. He wanted all the profit for himself. But he was so busy, he had no time to enjoy his profits. And, if he died, he had no family to inherit his wealth. In other words, all his labor was in vain. The Greek philosopher Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." But the independent man never stopped long enough to ask himself: "For whom am I working so hard? Why am I robbing myself of the enjoyments of life just to amass more and more money?" ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

Man all alone in dark with his money

and he never asked, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" He's so consumed by toil that he never pauses to reflect on the *WHY* behind his work. This rhetorical question highlights his blindness to futility: no one benefits from his sacrifice — not even himself. The tragedy here is not just working too hard — it's working without meaning, without people, and without asking why.

This too is vanity ([hebel](#) - fleeting, insubstantial, short-lived; [Lxx](#) - [mataiotes](#) - emptiness, nothingness, purposelessness) **and it is a grievous task** - **Grievous task** describes a painful, heavy burden, so this is not just empty ([hebel](#)) but emotionally draining.

William Barrick ([Ecclesiastes 4 Commentary](#)) - An exact rendering of the opening words of Ec 4:8YLT reveals both the concise nature of the statement and the usage of two numbers: "There is **one** and there is not a **second**." The writer introduces a discussion of loneliness (the one alone) and companionship (the one with a second). He qualifies what he means by "not a second": "neither a son nor a brother." Even the Lone Ranger needs Tonto. An individual who isolates himself from companionship fails to experience community and its God-ordained blessings. God Himself declared of the perfect man in his unfallen state, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2:18+). God advocates companionship over solo lives. Self-made hermits tend to be selfish and focused on the riches they hope their labor will bring to them. "Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches" reminds the reader of the earlier proverb in Ec 1:8. A third mention arises in Ec 5:10 where the writer offers further clarification: "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income." Why do people end up alone? There are various reasons a person like this ends up alone. We can speculate as to why, and his workaholism may provide a clue. It is more likely that for circumstantial reasons this person has found himself alone, and in this rough situation, he has sought meaning in work and wealth. But they fail to provide the meaning he seeks. (Bartholomew, Ecclesiastes, 189)

Barrick ([Ecclesiastes 4 Commentary](#)) on *he never asked, “And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?”* - Note that the translators of NAU have placed “*and he never asked*” (Eccl 4:8) in italics. The phrase does not occur in the original language. Does Solomon himself ask the question or is this just a general hypothetical illustration? Some commentators find in verses 7–8 a situation involving the absence of an heir, while verses 9–12 involve the absence of a companion, and verses 13–16, the absence of a successor. (Murphy, Ecclesiastes, 41) [Duane Garrett](#) offers a pithy and apropos synopsis: “*Money is their only kin.*” Preoccupied with climbing the corporate ladder, a man often tells himself that he does so in order to take care of his family, but, in reality, he is caught up in his projects to make a name for himself. His family soon becomes a casualty due to his neglect for their real welfare. Do you know someone who fits the illustrative examples that you read about here in Ecclesiastes?

Ray Stedman - Yet, he says, so powerful is ambition and the desire to be envied that men actually keep working and toiling even when they have no one to leave their riches to. How true! Some people keep on toiling although they have no one to work for, and nothing to do with the money they make. They even deny themselves the pleasures of life in order to keep laying up funds. What a sharp example is given to us in the recently concluded story of billionaire Howard Hughes. He did not know what to do with his money. His heirs, whom nobody can even identify for certain, are left to squabble over it. Somehow in all his tragic existence, the man never seemed to ask himself, “Why am I doing this? What is life all about? Why am I amassing tremendous amounts of money when I don’t even spend a dime on myself?” Such is the folly of toiling for riches.

Oswald Chambers - There is such a thing as an obsession of solitariness. Hermits, ascetics and celibates cut themselves off in revolt—“Because I cannot find peace or joy or happiness in the tyranny of civilised life or in commerce, and I cannot be an idle tramp, I become a solitary and live a sequestered life.” Solomon points out what history has proved that this is an experiment that ends disastrously, because a man cannot shut out what is inside by cutting himself off from the outside ([Shade of His Hand](#))

Ray Pritchard - - [Something New Under the Sun](#) ALONE AT THE TOP

Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. “For whom am I toiling,” he asked, “and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?” This too is meaningless—a miserable business! Ecclesiastes 4:7-8

Before you read any further, go back and read the above two verses again. Out loud. Now think for a moment. Who do you know that fits this profile? I think every person who reads this book knows at least one person like the man Solomon describes in verses 7-8.

Now that you have a name in mind, I'd like to describe this person. I think I know him well. I've met him many times. More than anything else, this man believes in the value of hard work and the inherent dignity of a job well done. He's probably married and has at least three children whose pictures he carries in his wallet. He loves his wife and thinks about her more than she knows. It's true he works long hours—often he's gone by six in the morning and doesn't come home until after seven at night.

The pressures at work are so enormous that it takes him an hour or two to unwind, so he doesn't spend much time talking in the evening. He's so tired that it's all he can do to read the paper, watch a little television and then go wearily to bed. His blood pressure is too high, he knows he needs to exercise, his diet isn't the best, and sometimes he's irritable and snaps at his family—and regrets it later.

It's true that he works seventy hours a week, but he doesn't think of himself as a workaholic. He simply loves his job—and he's good at it. And thankfully, he's able to bring home a nice paycheck and to provide good things for his family. One of these days he plans to slow down and smell the coffee. But not today. He gulps his coffee and heads for the door before his family knows he's gone.

One evening he comes home and his family is gone. While he was at work, the kids grew up, his wife went back to college and found a career of her own, his children moved out, and now the house is empty. He can't believe it. The Board of Directors just named him CEO. Now there's no one to share the good news with. He made it to the top—alone. This too is meaningless.

Slow me down, Lord, lest I jump the tracks and ruin my life. Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- Are you a workaholic? What would your family and friends say?
- Why do so many men feel that they have fulfilled their duty simply by bringing the paycheck home? Why are so many wives unhappy with husbands who feel that way?

Rent-a-Friend?

"For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" Ecclesiastes 4:8

For many around the world, life is getting lonelier. The number of Americans who have no friends has quadrupled since 1990. Certain European countries have up to 20 percent of their population feeling lonely, while in Japan, some elderly folks have resorted to crime so they can have the companionship of inmates in jail.

Entrepreneurs have come up with a "solution" to this loneliness epidemic—rent-a-friend. Hired by the hour, these people will meet you in a café to talk or accompany you to a party. One such "friend" was asked who her clientele was. "Lonely, 30- to 40-year-old professionals," she said, "who work long hours and don't have time to make many friends."

Ecclesiastes 4 describes a person who is all alone, without "son nor brother." There's "no end" to this worker's toil, yet his success isn't fulfilling (v. 8). "For whom am I toiling . . . ?" he asks, waking up to his plight. Far better to invest in relationships, which will make his workload lighter and provide help in trouble (vv. 9–12). Because, ultimately, success without friendship is "meaningless" (v. 8).

Ecclesiastes tells us that a cord of three strands isn't quickly broken (v. 12). But neither is it quickly woven. Since true friends can't be rented, let's invest the time needed to form them, with God as our third strand, weaving us tightly together. Sheridan Voysey (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

How are you investing time and effort into your friendships? Who could you welcome into your friendship group now?

Father, help me to be a good and loyal friend to others.

Today's Insights Most Bible scholars attribute the book of Ecclesiastes to King Solomon. The book begins: "The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1). Those scholars who support Solomon as author date the book to his final years as king (around 940 bc), during what the Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible says was the "golden era of Israelite wisdom." The book demonstrates the meaninglessness or vanity of a worldview that doesn't include God. The author concludes his book: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (12:13–14). Loving and obeying God is the goal and purpose of life. And as today's passage demonstrates, when we have Him as our third strand in the cord that binds all our friendships and relationships, we can stand strong (4:12).

Who Am I Working For?

"For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" Ecclesiastes 4:8

Henry worked 70 hours a week. He loved his job and brought home a sizeable paycheck to provide good things for his family. He always had plans to slow down but he never did. One evening he came home with great news—he had been promoted to the highest position in his company. But no one was home. Over the years, his children had grown up and moved out, his wife had found a career of her own, and now the house was empty. There was no one to share the good news with.

Solomon talked about the need to keep a balance in life with our work. He wrote, "Fools fold their hands and ruin themselves" (Eccl. 4:5). We don't want to go to the extreme of being lazy, but neither do we want to fall into the trap of being a workaholic. "Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind" (v. 6). In other words, it is better to have less and enjoy it more. Sacrificing relationships at the altar of success is unwise. Achievement is fleeting, while relationships are what make our life meaningful, rewarding, and enjoyable (vv. 7-12).

We can learn to work to live and not live to work by choosing to apportion our time wisely. The Lord can give us this wisdom as we seek Him and trust Him to be our Provider. Poh Fang Chia (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Lord, show me if my priorities are skewed and where I need to make changes. Thank You for the gift of family and friends.

To spend time wisely, invest it in eternity.

Today's Insights The book of Ecclesiastes laments the vanity of life when God is not taken into account. In regard to our work, Solomon calls us to seek moderation and contentment (4:6–8) and to find meaning, satisfaction, and enjoyment in cooperation with others (vv. 9–12). Sim Kay Tee

- **are:** Ge 2:18 Ex 4:14-16 Nu 11:14 Pr 27:17 Hag 1:14 Mk 6:7 Ac 13:2 Ac 15:39,40 1Co 12:18-21
- **a good:** Ru 2:12 Joh 4:36 2Jn 1:8

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Solomon has just spoken of a solitary man working endlessly with no one to share his wealth or joy. Here he speaks of one benefit of companionship.

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. NLT = "Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one; they get a better return for their labor" Life is not meant to be lived alone. Partnership, whether in work, friendship, or marriage, brings strength, accountability, and help in trouble. Together, people are more productive, more resilient, and often more fulfilled. The Hebrew phrase "**good return**" (šākār ṭōb) implies fruitful results, satisfying outcomes, not just wages.

Jesus sent disciples out two by two (Mark 6:7+), because ministry and mission are strengthened by partnership. Similarly, **The Church is a body**, not a lone warrior — we need one another. And best of all for believers, the The Holy Spirit is the ultimate Helper, the companion Who strengthens us as no human can.

Warren Wiersbe - Solomon's experience with the independent man caused him to consider the importance of friendship and the value of people doing things together. He may have recalled the Jewish proverb, "A friendless man is like a left hand bereft of the right." Perhaps he watched some pilgrims on the highway and drew the conclusion, "Two are better than one." Two are certainly better than one when it comes to working (Eccl. 4:9) because two workers can get more done. Even when they divide the profits, they still get a better return for their efforts than if they had worked alone. Also, it's much easier to do difficult jobs together because one can be an encouragement to the other. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

William Barrick ([Ecclesiastes 4 Commentary](#)) - Solomon identifies three examples of solitary existence in contrast to companionship in order to make his point. All three might arise from the experience of travel in the ancient Near East. The first might refer to falling into a pit or a ravine (Eccl 4:10), the second might describe attempts to keep warm outdoors during the cold of night (Eccl 4:11), and the third might refer to robbers encountered along the road (Eccl 4:12). The lessons should not be restricted to travel, however. A helper, a comforter, and a defender all apply to many life settings.

Ray Stedman - the Searcher admits that companionship is better than loneliness. Someone may well say, "It's true that men work out of a sense of ambition and a drive for admiration from others, but it is better to have companionship while doing so." The Searcher agrees, and lists four advantages to this: First, it will increase the reward. Two really can live cheaper than one. Many people get married on that basis. During the Depression, there was a popular song that said, "Potatoes are cheaper, tomatoes are cheaper, now's the time to fall in love." Many young people agreed with that and got married. But economics have changed. Today potatoes are dearer, tomatoes are dearer, but still, now is the time to fall in love because you can combine your resources. Even the IRS recognizes the advantage of this by giving some tax breaks in that regard.

*A shared life is more rewarding
than a lonely success.*

Human beings flourish in companionship, not isolation. Relationships enhance effort, provide support, and help overcome adversity. This verse teaches that life is fuller, work is more fruitful, and burdens are more bearable when shared with another. In a world of injustice and loneliness (as seen in the verses before), relationships are God's gift of comfort, strength, and joy.

Oswald Chambers on Eccl 4:9-12 The conclusion that Solomon comes to is that trade is better than idling; that both solitariness and society as it is are pretty bad, but that society is better than solitariness. Domestic life and married life and comradeship are all advocated by Solomon (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1-3). The Bible always emphasises the facts of life as they are. Whenever Jesus Christ applied His teaching to actual life He focused it round two points—marriage and money. If the religion of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit of God cannot deal with these things and keep a man and woman as God wants them to be, His religion is useless. ([Shade of His Hand](#))

Charles Bridges on Ec 4:9-12 - We have seen the misery of solitary selfishness. 'The man is so absorbed in covetousness, that he sacrificeth all his interest with his fellow-creatures.'¹ Contrast with this dark picture the pleasures and advantages of social bonds.

Bacon quotes from Aristotle, that ‘whosoever delighteth in solitude is either a wild beast or a god’—that is (as Abp. Whately explains it)—‘to man—such as man is—friendship is indispensable to happiness; and that one, who has no need, and feels no need of it, must be either much above human nature, or much below it.’² In a variety of instances we shall readily admit Solomon’s judgment—Two are better than one—‘more happy jointly, than either of them could be separately. The pleasure and advantage of holy love will be an abundant recompense for all the work and labour of love.’³ They have a good reward for their labour. For have they not richer enjoyment of the common good in the mutual effort to promote it?

Many instances in common life illustrate this aphorism. In a casual fall ready help is a Providential mercy. Woe to him that is alone when he falleth. Solitude may be death. (Gen. 4:8; 2 Sam. 14:6.) As if two lie together, heat is communicated. (1 Kings, 1:2.) In cases of assault, one might prevail, when by additional strength we might successfully withstand him (2 Sam. 10:11; Jer. 41:13, 14); like a cord, which when untwisted, is weak; but when bound together threefold (like the fabled bundle of rods) is not quickly broken.

We forget however the deep and weighty substance of Scripture, if we confine these illustrations to their literal application. The most sober principle of interpretation will admit a reference to all that glowing contact of united hearts, where each has a part and responsibility in helping and comforting the other. To begin at the beginning—with that ordinance, where God declared his own mind—“It is not good for man to be alone.” (Gen. 2:18. Comp. Ps. 48:6.) If it was “not good” in Paradise, much less is it in a wilderness world. What claim, then, has a monastic or a celibate life to higher perfection? When two are brought together by the Lord’s Providence (Gen. 2:22)—and specially when each is fitted to each other by his grace—“dwelling together as heirs of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7), in abiding union of hearts—having one faith—one hope—one aim—who can doubt the fact—Two are better than one? Love sweetens toil, soothes the sting of trouble, and gives a Christian zest of enjoyment to every course of daily life. The mutual exercises of sympathy give energy to prayer, and furnish large materials for confidence and praise.

Our Lord himself, who “knew what was in man,” ordered his Church upon this wise determination. When he “sent forth” his first ministers, “as sheep or lambs in the midst of wolves”—weak and unprotected—“two and two” was the arrangement. (Matt. 10:16. Luke, 10:1–3.) Was not this upon the forethought, that if they should fall, the one should help up his fellow? The Primitive Church—so far as circumstances permitted—acted under Divine direction upon this rule of mutual helpfulness.¹

We need scarcely remark, how clearly the principle of membership is here involved. The live coal left alone soon loses its vital heat. But heap the coals around it, and we have a genial atmosphere. The most lively professor left alone is in danger of waxing cold in selfishness. But the precious ‘communion of saints’ warms the Christian from the very centre. All is sound, when “the members of the body” (to use the Apostle’s favourite illustration) “have the same care one for another.” (1 Cor. 12:25.) Thus “from the” Divine “Head, the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love.” (Eph. 4:15, 16.)

This principle also rebukes the religious solitaire—that isolated being, who belongs to no Church, because no Church is perfect enough for him. ‘Take a ladder’—was Constantine’s advice to such a one—‘and climb up to heaven by thyself.’ Surely it is better to belong to an imperfect (not heretical) Church, than none; better to “continue steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts, 2:42); not only “first giving up our own selves to the Lord,” but “unto” the whole body of the Church “by the will of God.” (2 Cor. 8:5.) There can be no real membership with the body, except by the communication of mutual helpfulness “according to the measure of every part.” (Eph. 4:16, *ut supra.*) The solitaire just described is in continual danger when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him. The soldier falters alone; but, in fellowship with his comrades, he advances with confidence.

All the kindly offices of friendship—especially when cemented in the Christian bond—apply to this point. The united prayer of “any two, who shall agree touching anything they shall ask,” is sealed with acceptance. (Matt. 18:19.) Mutual faithfulness (Gal. 2:11–14; 6:1), consideration, inspection, and godly provocation (Heb. 10:24)—all enter into the sphere of Christian responsibility, and minister to the glory of our common Lord. Each of us has something to impart, to prevent discouragement—to receive, to teach us humility. The receiver is united to the giver by gratitude—the giver to the receiver by tender compassion.

In this sympathizing union of kindred spirits, “ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel. Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” (Prov. 27:9, 17.) The inferior may be the helper. The great Apostle acknowledged instrumental support through his own son in the faith. (2 Cor. 7:6; Tit. 1:4.) Jonathan, no less than David, “strengthened” his brother’s “hands in God.” (1 Sam. 23:16. Here the two were better than one; when each was employed in lifting up his fellow. Lord Bacon quotes the old proverb—‘A friend is another himself’—and then beautifully adds—‘No receipt openeth the heart but a true friend, to whom you may impart griefs, joys, fears, hopes, suspicions, counsels, and whatsoever lieth upon the heart to oppress it.’¹

Oh! let us ponder well the deep responsibility of our social obligations. Are we discharging them as unto the Lord—for the honour of his name, and for the edifying and increase of his Church? Did we but pray for each other as we ought, what a brotherhood would the family of man be! The time is short. Opportunities are passing away. Happy those, who have been fellow-helpers upon earth!

They shall rejoice before their gracious Lord with joy unspeakable—uninterrupted—without abatement—without end.

Ray Pritchard - - [Something New Under the Sun](#) TOGETHER IS BETTER

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

There were more than a few tears, and more hugs than I had seen in a long, long time. Old friends laughed and cried, and someone said, "Welcome back."

Welcome back, indeed. It reminded me of the words of the psalmist, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1). Such unity is like oil running down the beard of the high priest or like the dew on Mount Hermon. It is a precious sign of the Lord's blessing.

I was called to the meeting more as a moderator than anything else. At the beginning I reminded the group that it is the truth that sets us free. (See John 8:32.) When the truth-telling began, so did the tears—not of anger but of sorrow and love and, yes, even tears of joy.

Then the hugging began in earnest. Big, enormous bear hugs, the kind that almost take your breath away, the kind that says, "I love you and I'm going to hang in there with you and we're going to make it together."

More tears. And smiles. And a voice behind me, a man's voice, saying, "This is the work of the Holy Spirit."

More voices talking. Confessions of failure and doubt. Jokes shared about the hard times behind us. Promises made to each other. "What can we do to help you?" one person asked. A good question, and it brought forth a good answer, "Just listen to me when I need to talk out my problems."

At the end of this special meeting we made three promises. First, to let the past be the past. Second, to lower our expectations of each other so we wouldn't be surprised when the others aren't perfect. Third, to hold each other accountable for our spiritual growth.

Then we held hands and prayed together. Every prayer came straight from the heart. When we finished there were more hugs, lots of laughter, gifts of love given to each one, and a sense that we had all been part of a miracle.

When I left, group members were still talking. The sound of joy rang in my ears as I walked to my car. The party was just beginning.

Lord God, I thank You for the blessing of good friends, and I pray for the grace to be a good friend to others.
Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- How many close friends do you have? Do they know how you feel about them?
- In what areas of your life could you use some help from someone else?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read 1 Samuel 18:1-2; 20:12-17; Romans 15:5-6; and Ephesians 4:1-3.

A Genuine Friend

Two are better than one. —Ecclesiastes 4:9

In the novel *Shane*, a friendship forms between Joe Starrett, a farmer on the American frontier, and Shane, a mysterious man who stops to rest at the Starrett home. The men first bond as they work together to remove a giant tree stump from Joe's land. The relationship deepens as Joe rescues Shane from a fight and Shane helps Joe improve and guard his farmland. The men share a sense of mutual respect and loyalty that reflects what Scripture says: "Two are better than one If they fall, one will lift up his companion" (Eccl. 4:9-10).

Jonathan and David modeled this principle as well. Circumstances tested their friendship when David suspected that King Saul wanted him dead. Jonathan doubted this, but David believed it to be true (1 Sam. 20:2-3). Eventually, they decided David would hide in a field while Jonathan questioned his father about the matter. When Saul's deadly intent became clear, the friends wept together and Jonathan blessed David as he fled (v.42).

You have a genuine friend in Jesus if you have accepted His offer of salvation—a friend who is always loyal; one who lifts you when

you stumble. He has shown you the greatest love one friend can have for another—love that led Him to sacrifice His life for you (John 15:13). Jennifer Benson Schuldt (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
—Scriven

Jesus is your most trusted Friend.

Today's Insights Jonathan's friendship with David was marked by brotherly affection, but it also displayed Jonathan's self-sacrifice. The throne that would have been his destiny as the son of King Saul had already been given to David (1 Sam. 16:10-13).

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 Helping With Hurdles

Two are better than one For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. —Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

When my daughter Debbie was a little girl, she took ballet lessons. One dance exercise involved jumping over a rolled-up gym mat. Debbie's first attempt resulted in her bouncing off this hurdle. For a moment she sat on the floor stunned, and then she began to cry. Immediately, I darted out to help her up and spoke soothing words to her. Then, holding her hand, I ran with her until she successfully jumped over the rolled-up mat. Debbie needed my encouragement to clear that hurdle.

While working with Paul on his first missionary journey, John Mark faced a major hurdle of his own: Things got tough on the trip, and he quit. When Barnabas tried to re-enlist Mark for Paul's second journey, it created conflict. Barnabas wanted to give him a second chance, but Paul saw him as a liability. Ultimately, they parted ways, and Barnabas took Mark with him on his journey (Acts 15:36-39).

The Bible is silent about John Mark's response when Barnabas helped him over his ministry hurdle. However, he must have proven himself, because Paul later wrote that John Mark "is useful to me for ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11).

When we see a believer struggling with an apparent failure, we should provide help. Can you think of someone who needs your help to clear a hurdle?

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Kindness picks others up when troubles weigh them down.

Strong Support in Christ

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. Ecclesiastes 4:9

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

A runner in the London Marathon experienced why it's vital not to run the big race alone. After months of grueling preparation, the man wanted to finish strong. But as he stumbled toward the finish line, he found himself doubled over from exhaustion and on the verge of collapsing. Before he fell to the ground, two fellow marathoners grabbed his arms—one on his left and the other on his right—and helped the struggling runner complete the course.

Like that runner, the writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us of several important advantages that come from having others run the race of life with us. Solomon set forth the principle that "two are better than one" (Ecclesiastes 4:9). He shed a spotlight on the advantages of joint efforts and mutual toil. He also wrote that partnership can lead to "a good return for their labor" (v. 9). During times of difficulty, a companion is there to "help the other up" (v. 10). When nights are dark and cold, friends can huddle together to "keep warm" (v. 11). And, during danger, two "can defend themselves" against an assailant (v. 12). Those whose lives are woven together can possess great strength.

With all our weaknesses and frailties, we need the strong support and security of a community of believers in Jesus. Let's press on together as He leads us! Marvin Williams (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Why is companionship with other believers in Jesus so important in life's race? How can you improve the quality of your community in Him?

Dear God, please help me build a healthy community in Christ.

Today's Insights Going on a journey is the metaphorical context for Solomon's—or the Teacher's (Ecclesiastes 1:1)—discussion of two being better than one (4:9). They can carry more on their trek (v. 9), they can help each other out of perilous spots along the way (v. 10), they can keep warm during the cold nights (v. 11), and they're less likely to be assaulted before they reach their destination (v. 12). He concludes by pointing out that three is even better, for all the previous reasons. Despite the bleak outlook of the Teacher throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, he still finds glimmers of hope and goodness. The strength of companionship along a journey might be obvious, but for those who believe in Jesus, it takes on a richer hue. As we walk this road of discipleship, we're not alone. Christ walks with us. And He's traveled the path before and will deliver us safely to His Father's home.

Together We Win

Two are better than one . . . : If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE Exodus 17:8–13

In the middle of the night, Pastor Samuel Baggaga received a call asking him to come to the home of a church member. When he arrived, he found a house engulfed by fire. The father, though burned himself, had reentered the home to rescue one of his children and emerged with an unconscious daughter. The hospital, in this rural Ugandan setting, was six miles (10 kilometers) away. With no transportation available, the pastor and the father started running to the hospital with the child. When one of them tired from carrying the injured girl, the other one took over. Together they made the journey; the father and his daughter were treated and then fully recovered.

In Exodus 17:8–13 the Lord orchestrated a great victory that included the efforts of Joshua, who led fighting men on the battlefield; and Moses, who kept his hands raised while holding the staff of God. When Moses' hands grew weary, Aaron and Hur assisted by each holding up one of his hands until the setting of the sun and the defeat of the enemy.

The value of interdependence can never be underestimated. God, in His kindness, graciously provides people as His agents for mutual good. Listening ears and helpful hands; wise, comforting, and correcting words—these and other resources come to us and through us to others. Together we win and God gets the glory! Arthur Jackson (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

At what times in your life have you benefited from the support of others? Who might you know who needs you to run with them in this season of their life?

Father, thank You for those You've graciously provided in my life and for those You've allowed me to share life with for our mutual good and Your glory.

Today's Insights The Amalekites were one of a number of ancient tribes that persistently acted like a thorn in Israel's side. Their name comes from the founder of this particular group, Amalek, one of the grandsons of Esau (Genesis 36:12). This would make the Amalekites cousins of the Israelites, who were descendants of Jacob/Israel, Esau's twin brother. While it seems clear that Esau and Jacob had patched up their relationship with one another after years of hatred and resentment, the same can't be said of Esau's descendants. David fought against Amalekite raiders who'd stolen property, wives, and children from him and his men (2 Samuel 1:1). The Amalekites are mentioned for the final time in the Old Testament in 1 Chronicles 4:43, where they're finally defeated and destroyed by Israel. It's a long, sad story of hatred and its destructive results.

Two are better than one . . . : If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Four Reasons Why Two are Better Than One

First, two together reap a greater profit (v. 9).

Second, friends offer encouragement and help (v. 10).

Third, a friend offers special warmth (v. 11).

Fourth, a friend gives us strength (v. 12). (Today in the Word)

Ecclesiastes 4:8-12 Hold Hands and Jump!

Two are better than one. —Ecclesiastes 4:9

When Leo and Amy opened a 300-seat, fine-dining restaurant, Leo admitted he was “scared of everything.” Amy equates their leap of faith in starting their business to holding hands while jumping off a mountain. But if you’re going to do something scary, “you want to do it with someone you know and trust,” Leo continued.

Chris and Karie, another couple who took a risk to own and run a restaurant together, say they have “a good working relationship, as well as mutual admiration for each other’s work.”

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, knew how crucial it is to have companions in life. He wrote, “Two are better than one” (Ecclesiastes 4:9). When one falls during a difficult time, another provides comfort and support (vv.10-12). We need our spouses and friends to help us through the scary times and to provide emotional support. Loners make life harder for themselves (v.8). But those who recognize their need for others find help and encouragement.

If you need to take a leap of faith—something involving finances, a career change, a new ministry—invite someone trustworthy to hold your hand as you make that jump. Or give that same encouragement to someone close to you. Because two really are better than one. —Anne Cetas (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

We are dependent on the strength
We draw from one another;
Words spoken give encouragement,
Love practiced draws us closer.
—Sper

Those who trust God can help others to do the same

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Benefits Of Friendship

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. —Ecclesiastes 4:9

Cicero was one of the greatest thinkers of the Roman Empire. He was a skilled orator, lawyer, politician, linguist, and writer. Still today he is quoted for his clear prose and practical wisdom.

For instance, of having friends he wrote: “Friendship improves happiness and abates misery, by the doubling of our joy and the dividing of our grief.” He understood the double benefits of friendship along life’s journey.

Nearly a millennium earlier, King Solomon had written about the value of friends as well. In Ecclesiastes we read, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up” (4:9-10). Certainly a life without friends makes our sojourn lonely and hard to bear.

That famous Roman and that Jewish king were right: Friends are important. Friends serve as confidants, counselors, and burden-sharers.

Think about your friends. Have you been neglecting those God has provided to share your joys and sorrows? If so, seek out one of your friends for fellowship this week. Remember, “two are better than one,” because a friend can double our joy and divide our grief. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

A friend is “trust,” a friend is “warmth,”
A friend is “always there”
To add to every happiness,
To lessen every care.
—Anon.

Friends are flowers in the garden of life.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 Helping With Hurdles

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Kindness picks others up when troubles weigh them down.

Never Alone

Two are better than one . . . If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Today's Scripture & Insight : Ecclesiastes 4:8-12

"It can be an affliction more harrowing than homelessness, hunger or disease," wrote Maggie Fergusson in The Economist's 1843 magazine. Her subject? Loneliness. Fergusson chronicled the increasing rates of loneliness, irrespective of one's social or economic status, using heart-wrenching examples of what it feels like to be lonely.

The hurt of feeling alone isn't new to our day. Indeed, the pain of isolation echoes off the pages of the ancient book of Ecclesiastes. Often attributed to King Solomon, the book captures the sorrow of those who seem to lack any meaningful relationships (4:7-8). The speaker lamented that it's possible to acquire significant wealth and yet experience no value from it because there's no one to share it with.

But the speaker also recognized the beauty of companionship, writing that friends help you accomplish more than you could achieve on your own (v. 9); companions help in times of need (v. 10); partners bring comfort (v. 11); and friends can provide protection in difficult situations (v. 12).

Loneliness is a significant struggle—God created us to offer and receive the benefits of friendship and community. If you're feeling alone, pray that God would help you form meaningful connections with others. In the meantime, find encouragement in the reality that the believer is never truly alone because Jesus' Spirit is always with us (Matthew 28:20). By: Lisa M. Samra (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

How might you reach out to someone who's lonely? How have you experienced the blessing of God's Spirit with you when you've felt alone?

Heavenly Father, when I feel lonely, give me courage to reach out to others with an offer of friendship.

Let's Finish the Race

Two are better than one . . . If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

In the 2016 Rio Olympics, two athletes in the 5,000-meter race caught the world's attention. About 3,200 meters into the race, New Zealander Nikki Hamblin and American Abbey D'Agostino collided and fell. Abbey was quickly up on her feet, but stopped to help Nikki. Moments after the two athletes had started running again, Abbey began faltering, her right leg injured as a result of the fall. It was now Nikki's turn to stop and encourage her fellow athlete to finish the race. When Abbey eventually stumbled across the finish line, Nikki was waiting to embrace her. What a beautiful picture of mutual encouragement!

It reminds me of a passage in the Bible: "Two are better than one . . . If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up" (Eccl. 4:9-10). As runners in a spiritual race, we need one another—perhaps even more so, for we are not racing in competition with each other but as members of the same team. There'll be moments where we falter and need someone to pick us up; at other times, someone may need our encouragement through our prayers or presence.

The spiritual race is not to be run alone. Is God leading you to be a Nikki or Abbey in someone's life? Respond to His prompting today, and let's finish the race!

Dear Lord, thank You for the encouragement of fellow believers to help me on my journey. Help me to look for ways to encourage others. Poh Fang Chia (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

We need each other to get where God wants us to go.

Today's Insights Ecclesiastes is a very unusual book. For much of this inspired text, life is examined without God in the picture (1:2). Although the book concludes with moral admonitions (see 12:1-8), the majority of the book has almost a secular feel to it. Yet because King Solomon the Wise is its author, remarkable principles of life surface. Today's reading blesses the reader with insights on the benefits of meaningful relationships. The journey of life is not to be walked alone but benefits from mutual support of another. Can you recall a time when God used someone to help you carry your load?

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 We Need God And People

Give heed to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for to You I will pray. —Psalm 5:2

In 2006, while promoting the film Rocky Balboa, Sylvester Stallone surprised Christians with what he revealed. He said that his faith in Jesus Christ had not only influenced the writing of the first Rocky film but that his decision to create the final movie was inspired by his renewed affiliation with Christianity. As part of this transformation, Stallone realized that a poor choice had previously guided his life—self-reliance. He says, “You need to have the expertise and the guidance of someone else.” Stallone learned something that many people are beginning to acknowledge—we need God and we need other people.

The Bible confirms our need for God and others. David expressed his reliance on God through crying out to Him and pleading with Him in prayer. “Give heed to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for to You I will pray” (Ps. 5:2). And in Ecclesiastes we read that Solomon encouraged a proper reliance on others. In fact, he said helping each other can strengthen us, but individualism and self-reliance are dangerous and make for weakness. Two acting together are better than one self-reliant individual (4:9-12).

God gave us each other. Let's passionately rely on His power and draw from the help of others. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Christian fellowship provides us
With encouragement and love;
It will help us in our journey,
Till we reach our home above.
—Sper

We can go a lot further together than we can go alone.

Ecclesiastes 4:10 For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.

- **if:** Ex 32:2-4,21 De 9:19,20 1Sa 23:16 2Sa 11:27 12:7-14 Job 4:3,4 Isa 35:3,4 Lu 22:31,32 Ga 2:11-14 6:1 1Th 4:18 5:11
- **but:** Ge 4:8 2Sa 14:6

Related Passages:

Galatians 6:1-2 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

WHY TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. Solomon explains (**for** = term of explanation) why two are better

than one giving. Imagine two travelers on a harsh desert road. One falls into a pit, but the other lifts him out. Alone, he would perish. Together, they make it home.

Warren Wiersbe - Two are better when it comes to walking (Eccl. 4:10). Roads and paths in Palestine were not paved or even leveled, and there were many hidden rocks in the fields. It was not uncommon for even the most experienced traveler to stumble and fall, perhaps break a bone, or even fall into a hidden pit (Ex. 21:33–34). How wonderful to have a friend who can help you up (or out). But if this applies to our physical falls, how much more does it apply to those times when we stumble in our spiritual walk and need restoration (Gal. 6:1–2)? How grateful we should be for Christian friends who help us walk straight. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. - Solomon then present the contrasting (**but** = term of contrast) disadvantage of one by themselves.

*Pursue meaningful relationships —
don't go through life alone.*

Ray Stedman - a friend will provide help in time of trouble. If you get into difficulty your friend or roommate will be there to help you.

A Hand Up

If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. Ecclesiastes 4:10

Today's Scripture & Insight : Ecclesiastes 4:8–12

My children have enjoyed the thrill of a backyard ice-skating rink during our cold Idaho winters. When they were young, learning to skate was challenging: persuading them to deliberately set foot on the hard, icy surface proved difficult because they knew the pain of falling. Each time their feet slid out from under them, my husband or I would reach out to pull them again to their feet, setting them upright and steadyng their frames.

Having someone there to help us up when we fall is the gift of a helping hand depicted in Ecclesiastes. Working with another makes our work sweeter and more effective (4:9), and a friend brings warmth to our lives. When we encounter challenges, it helps to have someone come alongside with practical and emotional support. These relationships can give us strength, purpose, and comfort.

When we find ourselves flattened on the cold ice of life's hardships, is there a helping hand nearby? If so, it might be from God. Or when someone else needs a friend, could we be God's answer to lift them up? In being a companion, we often find one. If it appears that no one is nearby to lift us to our feet again, we can find comfort in knowing that God is our ever-present help (Psalm 46:1). As we reach out to Him, He's ready to steady us with His firm grip. By: Kirsten Holmberg (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Thank You, Father, for helping me up when life knocks me down. Thank You for the people You've used to encourage and strengthen me. Yours is the most faithful friendship I have.

How can you open yourself more fully to God's presence in your life?

Ecclesiastes 4:11 Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?

- 1Ki 1:1,2

Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone -In ancient cultures, travelers often slept in close proximity for warmth, especially in cold conditions without modern insulation. This passage could be applied not just to physical warmth, but also to the warmth of companionship, love, shared life, and emotional support. It reflects our design: we were made for relationship, not isolation. Loneliness is cold; companionship warms the soul. This passage is part of Solomon's argument that in a world full of toil, injustice, and isolation (as described in Ecclesiastes 4:1–8), companionship is a great gift and necessity.

Warren Wiersbe - Two are better than one when it comes to warmth (v. 11). Two travelers camping out, or even staying in the courtyard of a public inn, would feel the cold of the Palestinian night and need one another's warmth for comfort. The only way to be "warm alone" is to carry extra blankets and add to your load. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

Ray Stedman - You have to have grown up in Montana to fully appreciate the third advantage! When the temperature is 40-below-

zero outside, you understand what the Searcher means when he says, "If two lie together, they are warm; but how can one be warm alone?"

Ecclesiastes 4:11 A BIRD ON A CHIMNEY

... how can one be warm alone? Ecclesiastes 4:11

It was a bitterly cold morning. The night before had been one of those quiet ones when not a breeze stirs, and no cloud dims the brilliance of the starry heavens. Driving up the street from my home, with the sound of crunching snow under the tires, I could see trails of vapor ascending straight up from chimneys all over the neighborhood. These smoky columns appeared a frosty white as they glistened in the rays of the morning sun. Suddenly my eyes were arrested by one chimney in particular. There was a dark object on top of it. As I came closer, I recognized that a bird (and a wise old fellow he was) had perched there to soak up some heat. In that "cold, cold world," he had found a place of warmth, while his other feathered friends were no doubt shivering in their frigid sub-zero surroundings. As I saw him there, I was reminded anew that we, as believers, live in a spiritually cold world that is no "friend to grace." Wise is that Christian who avails himself of those warming influences provided by God Himself, such as Bible study, prayer, and the assembling together with those of like precious faith. What a blessing is afforded to those who meet regularly with other believers for fellowship and worship. Much of the spiritual coldness we see today is because folks neglect this sacred duty which has been especially ordained by God Himself for the benefit of those who are chilled in their soul by the adverse winds of this hostile world. The author of Hebrews admonishes us not to for-sake "the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is," but rather to exhort one another more and more, as we see the day of Christ's return approaching (Heb. 10:25).

The writer of Ecclesiastes asks, ". . . how can one be warm alone?" I would make an application of this to believers today. If a person refuses to gather regularly with others for the teaching of the Word, the breaking of bread, and the joys of Christian fellowship, ". . . how can [he] be warm alone?" (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

With joy we hail the sacred day
Which God hath called His own;
With joy the summons we obey
To worship at His throne.
— H. Auber

"Floating" church members make for a sinking church!

Ecclesiastes 4:12 And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

■ and a: 2Sa 23:9,16,18,19,23 Da 3:16,17 Eph 4:3

CORD OF THREE STRANDS

And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart- NLT = "A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken." One person alone is vulnerable to attack. Two people working together are stronger and can resist opposition. A "cord of three strands"—a braided rope—is even stronger, symbolizing how unity and partnership create resilience. This verse is often used to emphasize the strength of relationships, especially when God is the "third strand" in a marriage.

Warren Wiersbe - two are better than one when it comes to their watchcare, especially at night (Ec 4:12). "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves" (Ec 4:12, NIV). It was dangerous for anyone to travel alone, day or night; most people traveled in groups for fellowship and for safety. Even David was grateful for a friend who stepped in and saved the king's life (2 Sam. 21:15–17). Solomon started with the number **one** (v. 8), then moved to **two** (Ec 4:9), and then closed with **three** (Ec 4:12). This is typical of Hebrew literature (Prov. 6:16; Amos 1:3, 6, 9, etc.). One cord could be broken easily; two cords would require more strength; but three cords woven together could not be easily broken. If two travelers are better than one, then three would fare even

better. Solomon had more than numbers in mind; he was also thinking of the unity involved in three cords woven together—what a beautiful picture of friendship! ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

Ray Stedman - the presence of another or more than one other in your life makes defeat unlikely: "A man might prevail against one but two will withstand him, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken." While there are advantages in companionship, nevertheless the Searcher's argument is that still it adds up to emptiness; it does not satisfy the sense of eternity that God has put in men's hearts. Many a couple sit in loneliness, staring at a television screen for hours at a time, or seek some other diversion to fill the emptiness and misery of their lives. No, companionship, though better than loneliness, is not the answer either.

William Barrick ([Ecclesiastes 4 Commentary](#)) - References to a three-strand or three-ply rope (cord) occur in ancient Sumerian and Akkadian texts. In the Sumerian story of Gilgamesh's encounter with Humbaba, guardian of the Cedar Forest, Gilgamesh exhorts his friend Enkidu not to abandon his quest. He says, "Two men will not die; the towed rope will not sink. A towrope of three strands cannot be cut. You help me and I will help you." This mention of the three-strand rope concludes the section dealing with pairs of people.

Treasury of Scripture Knowledge - This is well illustrated by the fable of the dying father, who, to shew his sons the advantages of union, gave them a bundle of twigs, which could not be broken when bound together, but were easily snapped asunder one by one.

Community in Christ

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:12

Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

"I knew that the only way to succeed was to forget about home and my wife, son, and daughter," said Jordon. "I've found I can't do that. They're woven into the fabric of my heart and soul." Alone in a remote area, Jordon was participating in a reality show where contestants are asked to survive outdoors with minimal supplies for as long as possible. What forced him to forfeit was not the grizzly bears, freezing temperatures, injury, or hunger, but an overwhelming loneliness and desire to be with his family.

We might have all the survival skills necessary for the wilderness, but separating ourselves from community is a sure way to fail. The wise author of Ecclesiastes said, "Two are better than one, because . . . one can help the other up" (4:9-10). Christ-honoring community, even with all its messiness, is essential to our thriving. We don't stand a chance against the trials of this world if we try to tackle them on our own. Someone who toils alone, toils in vain (v. 8). Without community, we're more susceptible to danger (vv. 11-12). Unlike a single thread, "a cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (v. 12). The gift of a loving, Christ-focused community is one that not only provides encouragement, but also gives us strength to thrive despite challenging situations. We need each other. Karen Pimpo (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

How can you commit to spending time with the family of believers? Who around you is isolated and in need?

Father, thank You for the gift of community! Open my heart to love and spend time with others today.

Today's Insights Along with Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes is classified as one of the Wisdom books of Scripture. Wisdom books, which emphasize the supreme value of fearing God (Ecclesiastes 8:13; 12:13), help the reader navigate the good and not-so-good—the bitter and sweet of this life—from God's perspective and to trust Him. Given Wisdom Literature's goal—to help its readers to "live skillfully"—it shouldn't surprise us to find numerous occurrences in the book of Ecclesiastes of the word better or the phrase better than. The comparative value of wisdom is stressed in passages such as "Wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness" (2:13); "Wisdom is better than strength" (9:16); "Wisdom is better than weapons of war" (9:18). We also see this emphasis in Proverbs: "For she [wisdom] is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold" (3:14). Discover the [life-changing wisdom of Ecclesiastes](#).

Braided Together

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:12

Today's Scripture & Insight : Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

A friend gave me a houseplant she'd owned for more than forty years. The plant was equal to my height, and it produced large leaves from three separate spindly trunks. Over time, the weight of the leaves had caused all three of the stalks to curve down toward the floor. To straighten them, I put a wedge under the plant's pot and placed it near a window so the sunlight could draw the leaves upward and help cure its bad posture.

Shortly after receiving the plant, I saw one just like it in a waiting room at a local business. It also grew from three long skinny stalks, but they'd been braided together to form a larger, more solid core. This plant stood upright without any help.

Any two people may stay in the same "pot" for years, yet grow apart and experience fewer of the benefits God wants them to enjoy. When their lives are woven together with God, however, there is a greater sense of stability and closeness. Their relationship will grow stronger. "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

Like houseplants, marriages and friendships require some nurturing. Tending to these relationships involves merging spiritually so that God is present at the center of each important bond. He's an endless supply of love and grace—the things we need most to stay happily united with each other. By: Jennifer Benson Schultdt (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

What can you do to strengthen the spiritual bonds you share with the important people in your life? How might your relationships change if serving and worshiping God together became a priority?

Dear God, I welcome You into my closest relationships today.

The Saddest Goose

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.
Ecclesiastes 4:12

Read - Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

Why is there a football in the parking lot? I wondered. But as I got closer, I realized the greyish lump wasn't a football: it was a goose—the saddest Canada goose I'd ever seen.

Geese often congregate on the lawn near my workplace in the spring and fall. But today there was only one, its neck arched back and its head tucked beneath a wing. Where are your buddies? I thought. Poor thing was all alone. It looked so lonely, I wanted to give it a hug. (Note: don't try this.)

I've rarely seen a goose completely alone like my lonesome feathered friend. Geese are notably communal, flying in a V-formation to deflect the wind. They're made to be together.

As human beings, we were created for community too (see Genesis 2:18). And in Ecclesiastes 4:10, Solomon describes how vulnerable we are when we're alone: "Pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up." There's strength in numbers, he added, for "though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (v. 12).

This is just as true for us spiritually as it is physically. God never intended for us to "fly" alone, vulnerably isolated. We need relationships with each other for encouragement, refreshment, and growth (see also 1 Corinthians 12:21). During these extraordinary days, due to the Covid-19 virus many of us have needed to practice physical distancing to help contain the disease. But how we look forward to the time we can meet face-to-face with our local church families again!

Together, we can stand firm when life's headwinds gust our way. Together.

What kinds of circumstances tempt you to go it alone? Who do you know who could use a word of encouragement from you?

Loving God, help us to remember that You never meant us to fly solo, but together with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Today, help us to see and support someone in need of encouragement. Adam R. Holz (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Today's Insights The author of Ecclesiastes uses practical illustrations that show the importance of companionship. Looking at verse 9, we learn that two "have a good return for their labor." This verse points back to verse 8 which explains that it's meaningless and miserable to toil for oneself. Not only do two have a better return, but two can help each other in multiple ways. In the illustration of one person falling down, many commentators believe it refers to a serious fall (v. 10). In that time, it was common to dig pits and cover them to trap animals. Falling into one could cause injury and being left alone could be fatal. Additionally, roads were dangerous in the ancient Near East, and two could better defend themselves against robbers and other attacks. The author's conclusion that "a cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (v. 12) emphasizes the need for companionship.

Ecclesiastes 4:7-12 Designed For Companionship

A threefold cord is not quickly broken. --Ecclesiastes 4:12

We do not function well as loners. I have seen an old high school friend become an unhappy recluse. I know of a man who became angry with his church board, stopped attending services, and rejected all who tried to reach out to him. He said he needed no one except God. Yet he was a miserable old man who cried and cried when he became terminally ill.

In Ecclesiastes 4:8 we read about a lonely person who devoted all his energy to the pursuit of wealth. He didn't have time for friends or family. He worked very hard, yet his wealth didn't satisfy the void in his life.

After depicting the lonely man, the author of Ecclesiastes illustrated the advantages of fellowship and partnership (vv.9-12). He did so by referring to the value and productivity of two laboring together (v.9), of one helping the other when one falls (v.10), of two keeping each other warm on cold nights (v.11), and of two protecting each other when attacked (v.12). The closing example, "A threefold cord is not quickly broken," was a proverbial way of saying "there is strength in numbers."

God has designed us with a need for one another. So be sure to have friends, and be a friend. That's the only way to fulfill God's design for companionship. —Herbert Vander Lugt (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

I went out to find a friend
But could not find one there;
I went out to be a friend,
And friends were everywhere!
--Anon.

The time to make friends is before you need them

Ecclesiastes 4:13 A poor yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction.

- **poor:** Ec 9:15,16 Ge 37:2 Pr 19:1 28:6,15,16
- will no more be: Heb. knoweth not to be, 1Ki 22:8 2Ch 16:9,10 24:20-22 25:16

BETTER POOR AND WISE THAN RICH AND PROUD

A poor yet wise (chakam; Lxx - sophos) lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction - We cannot discern whether Solomon had specific people in mind in Ecc 4:13-16. Note the three contrasts - youth versus old age, poor versus rich, wise versus foolish. This is opposite most ancient thought that older were wiser. In the contrast, despite the old king's social and financial advantages, Solomon says wisdom tops everything.

This proverb-like verse contrasts two kinds of leadership and wisdom: A young, poor, but wise boy (low status, but teachable) versus an old, wealthy king (high status, but unteachable). The central message: Teachability and wisdom are better than power and pride. It's better to be lowly and wise than exalted and foolish.

Picture a weathered king in fine robes with a crown, sitting on a throne, arms crossed stubbornly as wise counselors try to advise him—but he scoffs. Beside him stands a humble, ragged young boy, listening intently, scroll in hand, learning eagerly. This image portrays how status means little without humility and wisdom.

Wealth and position are no guarantee of success, and poverty and seeming failure are no barriers to achievement. The key is wisdom.

-- Warren Wiersbe

Ray Stedman - This says, in effect, that living a long life does not always guarantee that one will learn the secrets of enjoyment. This is what the Searcher has been saying, that God has a perfect plan and he will teach you as you go; if you live long enough and listen carefully you will learn that enjoyment is a gift of God. But now comes the argument that people who live a long time still do not seem to learn this.

William Barrick (Ecclesiastes 4 Commentary) on Ec 4:13–16 - Sometimes the aged lack wisdom and act foolishly (Job 12:20). On the other hand, the younger may be wiser than their elders (Ps 119:100). Old Testament writers employ the word for "lad" (Eccl 4:13) for Joseph at the age of 17 (Gen 37:30) and for the companions of Rehoboam when he was over the age of 40 (1 Kgs 12:8; cp. the first use of the term in Gen 4:23), as well as utilizing the term to describe young children (Gen 21:8; Exod 2:9). Therefore, the

contrast focuses on relative ages, not on someone being very young. Suggestions for identifying the kings in this text include Joseph (see Eccl 4:14, “he has come out of prison”) and Pharaoh as well as Saul and David. Another incident involves Solomon’s son Rehoboam who ignored the advice of his counselors (1 Kgs 12:1–19). Henry Morris speculates that the entire story stems from the Lord’s revelation given to Solomon in 1 Kings 11:11–13. Solomon himself had become foolish and one of his servants whom Solomon had driven into exile in Egypt (1 Kgs 11:26–40) would supplant Solomon’s son, Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12:1–24), though Rehoboam would still retain power over one tribe. ([The Remarkable Wisdom of Solomon](#)) Ahijah the prophet confirmed the revelation given by the Lord to Solomon (1 Kgs 11:29–39). If the illustration in Ecclesiastes 4:13–16 actually possesses a historical precedent, the prophetic announcements to Solomon and Jeroboam would seem to fit the best. However, there is insufficient evidence to enable a dogmatic identification. Even in the modern era, former political prisoners or exiled leaders occasionally replace a foolish regime (e.g., Iran, Nicaragua, South Africa, and South Korea). Prisons in the ancient Near East did not house criminals and traitors alone. Often the prisons were filled with individuals unable to pay their debts or to fulfill their financial obligations.¹⁹ Thus, also mentions that the second king was poor as well as the fact that he was born in poverty (Eccl 4:13–14). An underlying lesson applies to the wisdom of accepting advice and counsel. The king proves to be foolish when he “no longer knows how to receive instruction” (Eccl 4:13). The term used for “instruction” might also be translated “admonition” or even “warning.” In essence, the aged king was acting as a loner, refusing to listen to his counselors. Proverbs identifies wise counsel as characteristic of the best plans and decisions (Pr 11:14; 15:22; 20:18; 21:5; 24:6; cp. Luke 14:31). Of course, the best counsel comes from God Himself (Prov 16:1, 3, 9; 19:21). Solomon lived long enough, had enough interaction with fellow royals throughout the Near East, and gathered enough information from his ships’ voyages to India and Africa to have learned of such a situation in another land. In brief, wisdom, age, power, youth, political astuteness, and popularity all fail to guarantee political success or longevity. In the end, subsequent generations of citizens will forget both the wise and the foolish, the aged and the young, the popular and the unpopular.

Wise (adjective)([02450](#)) **chakam** from verb **chakam** - to be wise) means wise, shrewd, i.e., a capacity for understanding and discernment ([Pr 10:8](#)). It can mean skilled, i.e., pertaining to the knowledge of a craftsman in some technical work (Ex 35:10, 25; 36:1, 2, 4, 8; Isa 3:3; Jer 10:9; Eze 27:8) **Chakam** is an adjective which can refer to professional skill and ability, or to moral character and a person’s relationship with God. It also refers to a “God-fearing person,”

In the spiritual sense, to walk in wisdom is to walk in proper relationship with God, for God is the source of all true wisdom. The LORD promised Israel that if they would follow his laws, the nations would acknowledge their wisdom, the favor of God (Deut. 4:6). Both wise and foolish people die. The grave becomes the home of the fool, but God redeems the life of the wise person from the grave and takes him to himself, indicating that even in the OT, there was hope beyond the grave for those who followed God (Ps. 49:10). This is in contrast to the preacher who claimed that the wise and the fool both die and then are quickly forgotten (Ecc. 2:16). People are not to follow what appears to be wise, but they are to fear the LORD, following his ways and turning from evil. This is the source of life and health, and it will cause the person to become a source of life to others (Prov. 13:14). The wise are not to boast in their own wisdom; rather, they are to boast in their knowledge of God’s kindness, justice and righteousness (Jer. 9:23).

The wise will do what is right, although no one is wise enough to comprehend all of God’s ways. Thus, all our works must be committed into God’s hands. The future may bring success or failure; despite all our wisdom and abilities, there is still an element of chance in life. The wise, however, will still do what is right (Ecc. 8:17; 9:1, 11; 10:2).

CHAKAM IN ECCLESIASTES - Eccl. 2:14; Eccl. 2:16; Eccl. 2:19; Eccl. 4:13; Eccl. 6:8; Eccl. 7:4; Eccl. 7:5; Eccl. 7:7; Eccl. 7:19; Eccl. 8:1; Eccl. 8:5; Eccl. 8:17; Eccl. 9:1; Eccl. 9:11; Eccl. 9:15; Eccl. 9:17; Eccl. 10:2; Eccl. 10:12; Eccl. 12:9; Eccl. 12:11

Charles Bridges on Ec 4:13-14 - Riches were the last instance of vanity. Here Solomon affixes the stamp upon honour—man’s highest condition. This is not indeed the ordinary course. God’s people are often left in a low condition, while the ungodly maintain a royal elevation. But such cases do occur; and probably he had some example before his eyes of an old and foolish king beyond the border, raised to the throne without any fitness to reign, and showing his folly pre-eminently by unwillingness to be admonished. For the man, who has no counsel from his own store, and refuses to receive it from another’s, has an undoubted claim to the character of a fool. Indeed old and foolish—feebleness of mind and obstinacy linked together throw a cloud over the splendour of an earthly crown. For ‘place and dignity can never make a man so happy, as his folly will make him miserable.’¹

The contrast is minutely drawn—between the king and the poor—the old man and the child—the foolish and the wise. The balance is given in favour of the child, though poor. ‘Such pearls are not to be slighted, though in the dust.’² For we are taught to despise not either youth (1 Tim. 4:12) or poverty. (Jam. 2:1–6.) Real worth is determined, not by outward show, but by solid usefulness. Royalty

itself may sink in estimation, when set against attainments brought out of the lowest walks of life. From many a ragged school or wretched hovel may be dug out the richest stores of moral and intellectual wealth, compared with which the monarch's crown is the very tinsel of vanity. 'The king, becoming poor by his own extravagance, stalks his little hour of magnificence, and then descends, the ghost of departed greatness, into the land of condemnation.'³

This comparison is confirmed by the different event happening to each. The child may for a while be in inglorious poverty. But may it not be the Divine purpose to bring, as it were another Joseph out of prison,¹ or a Daniel out of captivity (Dan. 1:6; 6:1), and to raise him to an honourable elevation? Wisdom may be the fruit of the prison discipline, and supply to the child what he wants in years (1 Kings, 3:6–12); while the old and foolish king—born to an empire—born in his kingdom as his rightful inheritance—a beggar dies in obscurity; (2 Kings, 23:31–34; 24:12; 25:7; Lam. 4:20.) 'The wisdom of the one may advance him to a sceptre; the folly of the other, as recorded experience testifies, may wrest the sceptre from his hand.'²

'If he, who from a dungeon shall through his wisdom be advanced to a throne, be preferred to him, who, born in his kingdom, is reduced to poverty by his folly; how honourable and happy will they be, who by faith in the Son of God are advanced from the bondage of sin and Satan to the glorious "kingdom that cannot be moved!"' ³ Joyous is the prospect of the resurrection morning—when their prison garments being changed for the glorious image of their Lord—out of prison they shall come forth to reign—sharers of his throne for ever.

Ray Pritchard - - [Something New Under the Sun](#) THINGS WE CANNOT CONTROL

Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning. The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king's successor. There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Ecclesiastes 4:13-16

Commentators disagree on the situation described in verses 13-16. Apparently a king, popular in his youth, had grown foolish in his old age (perhaps through carelessness or greed, or it could be nothing more than the toll of advancing years). He no longer listened to the advice of others. Along came a younger man—energetic, full of ideas, brimming with vitality, eager to lead the country into a brighter future. Eventually the king lost his throne and the young man took his place.

The people cheered and the nation prospered. Then it happened again. After years in office, many people were not satisfied with the now not-so-young king. His idealism had vanished—or so it seemed. His vision for the future had slowly dissipated, and all that energy had evaporated with the passage of time. In the end he seemed just like the man he replaced—old, out-of-touch, cranky and creaky, an

anachronism, a relic of bygone days. So the people cried out, "Give us a new king." Although Solomon doesn't spell it out, we may be sure that another young man rose to the throne and the cycle repeated itself again.

There are many lessons here, including the obvious one that fame is fleeting. Today's heroes are tomorrow's bums. Our attention is short, our memories nonexistent, our only question, "What have you done for me lately?" There's nothing one can do about this but to accept reality-As I noted in chapter 5, our local historical society hosts an annual

cemetery walk. As part of this event, area residents dress in period costumes and act out the life stories of notable men and women buried in this particular cemetery. For three years I portrayed the famous evangelist Billy Sunday at his gravesite. Each year I pondered the fact that in his day Billy Sunday was one of the most important men in America. He preached face-to-face to over 100 million people—and this before the age of radio, television, public address systems, computers, and VCRs. Today the public at large hardly knows his name. Rarely does anyone visit his grave.

This is the way it is. Solomon's advice is, "You don't like the idea that you can be replaced? Get used to it." As the late French president Charles DeGaulle once remarked, "The graveyards are full of indispensable men."

This truth might make you depressed—and it probably will if you've been hoping to take the world by storm. Good luck, and don't forget to leave a forwarding address. Here's some free advice: Do your best each day. Don't fret over how you will be remembered when you are gone. Invest your life in the things that really matter, and let God take care of your reputation.

Spirit of God, deliver me from faithless fear about things I cannot control. Help me to do my best and then to leave the results with You. Amen.

- Name some leaders in history (ancient or modern) who started well but ended poorly (or people who started with widespread support but ended up rejected and forgotten).
- How does the Christian gospel address the problem of the fleeting nature of earthly fame? (Hint: See 1 John 2:17.)

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Deuteronomy 31:6; Matthew 16:24-27; and 2 Timothy 2:2.

Ecclesiastes 4:13-1 Fleeting Success

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. --Colossians 3:2

Having many friends and being rich are great blessings, but popularity and success do not guarantee a happy life. To make this point, Solomon called attention to an elderly king who ignored the wishes of his subjects and was replaced. His young successor was popular at first, but he also fell into disfavor. Solomon concluded, "Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind" (Eccl. 4:16).

Life at the top is fleeting. Presidents and prime ministers may have extremely high approval ratings for a while, but they don't last. About 20 years ago I knew several top executives who were highly successful because of their winning personalities and outstanding abilities. Yet they lost their high-salaried positions because they could not keep up with the rapid changes their jobs demanded. Today, because of company mergers and corporate downsizing, many of their replacements have also lost their positions.

How we view popularity and success depends on what we value most. If we set our hearts on earthly things, we will eventually be disappointed. But if we set our hearts on Christ and live for Him, we will find that He is faithful to provide for our every need. Many have made this discovery. Have you? —Herbert Vander Lugt (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

You will surely find at the journey's end,
Whatever the world may afford,
That things fade away, but success is seen
In the life that has served the Lord.
--Anon.

The master key to success is knowing the Master

Ecclesiastes 4:14 For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom.

- **For** : Ge 41:14,33-44 Job 5:11 Ps 113:7,8
- **even though** : 1Ki 14:26,27 2Ki 23:31-34 24:1,2,6,12 25:7,27-30 La 4:20 Da 4:31

For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom- NLT = "Such a youth could come from prison and succeed. He might even become king, though he was born in poverty." Solomon highlights how a person of low status, even a prisoner or a poor man, can rise to power, and even become a king. This speaks to the fluid nature of status, success, and influence in human society. Solomon is exposing the cyclical and shallow nature of human popularity and leadership

This verse may evoke biblical examples of such reversal: Joseph – imprisoned in Egypt, then raised to second-in-command (Genesis 41:14, 40). David – a shepherd and fugitive, yet anointed king.

Treasury of Scripture Knowledge - This is probably an allusion to some fact with which we are unacquainted. History furnishes many instances of mean persons raised to sovereign authority, and of kings being reduced to the meanest offices, and to a morsel. Agrippa mounted the throne of Israel after having been long in prison; and similar instances are not wanting in modern times.

Ray Stedman - A wise youth is better than an old foolish king who had great opportunities handed to him. Yet age can make one headstrong and fanatical, convinced that everything he wants to do is right. Even living a long time does not teach us all the lessons, although a long life usually does teach a lot of lessons. But all of us know people who ought to know better, people who have forgotten, as this points out, the lessons they learned in their youth. Here was a king who had gone from prison to the throne because he understood life, he had been poor and he was exalted to a position of power, but he had forgotten all the lessons he had learned.

Ecclesiastes 4:15 I have seen all the living under the sun throng to the side of the second lad who replaces him.

■ 2Sa 15:6

I have seen all the living under the sun throng to the side of the second lad who replaces him- NLT = Everyone is eager to help such a youth, even to help him take the throne." This is a confusing verse because some take this second lad as referring to the poor, wise lad of Ec 4:13 and then take "second" as meaning second to the king. Others take the second youth is a third character.

Duane Garrett - Eventually a second youth moves in to take the old king's throne. The "latter youth" is none other than the one mentioned in v. 13; he is chronologically second since the now-aged king who rose from obscurity to power (v. 14) is the implied first youth. Like Absalom in David's old age, the latter youth uses his energy and political cunning to gain the hearts of a people who are weary of the now-aloof, inflexible, and aged monarch. (See [Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs - Volume 14 - Page 309](#))

Charles Bridges on Ec 4:15-16 - The Preacher now turns to the people. He finds the same vanity and vexation as elsewhere. He takes an extensive survey, considering all the living which walk under the sun. Generation after generation pass before his mind's eye. All is the same character. The hereditary disease is fondness for change. Here is the king with the heir apparent—the second1—next to his throne, that shall stand up in his stead. The homage of all ranks is soon transferred to him. There is no end to the fickle multitude. "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie; to lay in the balance they are altogether lighter than vanity." (Ps. 62:9.) Such was the testimony of the Preacher's father, abundantly confirmed by his own sad experience. Though he had been eminently the father of his people, how easily did the second child "steal their hearts from him!" (2 Sam. 15:6, 12, 13.) Wayward Adonijah in his last days brought out the same proofs of this popular inconstancy. (1 Kings, 2:15, with 1:6, 25.) Perhaps Solomon himself might have been mortified by some marks of the neglect of the setting, and worshipping of the rising, sun.2

This appeared to the preacher to be the universal rule; human nature in every age alike. There was no end of all the people. The giddy and inconstant multitude go on from generation to generation. Solomon had seen it himself. So had others before him. So it would go on to the end. They would abandon the present idol, as those had done, who had been before them. The heir that is now worshipped with servility will have his turn of mortification. They that come after shall not rejoice in him. "Cease ye from man," therefore, "whose breath is in his nostrils"—is the much-needed exhortation—"for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Isa. 2:22.) The smile of to-day may be changed for the frown of to-morrow. (Mark, 11:8; 15:8, 14.) The love of change is a dominant principle of selfishness—insensible to our present blessings, and craving for some imaginary good. 'The man is rarely found, who is not more taken up with the prospect of future hopes, than with the enjoyment of his present possession.'1 This constant anxiety is an humbling trial to Royalty. The crown of the brightest jewels is often a crown of thorns.

But after all—think of our Great Sovereign—is not he entitled to our undecaying, supreme, and devoted love? His willing people will shew no fickleness here. He deserves all. He claims all. He gives all. Never, therefore, let him have less than all. Will not every service bring an hundredfold reward in peace—joy—salvation—heaven?

Ecclesiastes 4:16 There is no end to all the people, to all who were before them, and even the ones who will come later will not be happy with him, for this too is vanity and striving after wind.

KJV Ecclesiastes 4:16 There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 4:16 There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king; Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

BGT Ecclesiastes 4:16 ο κ στιν περασμις τ παντ λα το ζ π σιν σοι γ νοντο μπροσθεν α τ ν κα γε ο σχατοι ο κ ε φρανθ σονται ν α τ τι κα γε το το μαται της κα προα ρεσις πνε ματος

LXE Ecclesiastes 4:16 There is no end to all the people, to all who were before them: and the last shall not rejoice in him: for this also is vanity and waywardness of spirit.

NET Ecclesiastes 4:16 There is no end to all the people nor to the past generations, yet future generations will not rejoice in him. This also is profitless and like chasing the wind.

CSB Ecclesiastes 4:16 There is no limit to all the people who were before them, yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. This too is futile and a pursuit of the wind.

ESV Ecclesiastes 4:16 There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

NIV Ecclesiastes 4:16 There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

NLT Ecclesiastes 4:16 Endless crowds stand around him, but then another generation grows up and rejects him, too. So it is all meaningless-- like chasing the wind.

YLT Ecclesiastes 4:16 there is no end to all the people, to all who were before them; also, the latter rejoice not in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

NJB Ecclesiastes 4:16 He takes his place at the head of innumerable subjects; but his successors will not think the more kindly of him for that. This too is futile and chasing after the wind.

NRS Ecclesiastes 4:16 there was no end to all those people whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a chasing after wind.

NAB Ecclesiastes 4:16 There is no end to all these people, to all over whom he takes precedence; yet the later generations will not applaud him. This also is vanity and a chase after wind.

GWN Ecclesiastes 4:16 There was no end to all those people, everyone whom he led.?kings."> But those who will come later will not be happy with the successor. Even this is pointless.it's like trying to catch the wind.

BBE Ecclesiastes 4:16 There was no end of all the people, of all those whose head he was, but they who come later will have no delight in him. This again is to no purpose and desire for wind.

RSV Ecclesiastes 4:16 there was no end of all the people; he was over all of them. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

- **no end:** 2Sa 15:12,13 1Ki 1:5-7,40 12:10-16
- **they also:** Jud 9:19,20 2Sa 18:7,8 19:9
- **this:** Ec 1:14 2:11,17,26

THE VANITY OF POPULARITY & CHASING THE WIND OF APPROVAL

There is no end to all the people, to all who were before them, and even the ones who will come later will not be happy with him, for this too is vanity (hebel - fleeting, insubstantial, short-lived; Lxx - mataiotes - emptiness, nothingness, purposelessness) **and striving after wind** (Image of chasing something intangible and uncontrollable.). - **NLT** = "Endless crowds stand around him, but then another generation grows up and rejects him, too." This verse is a sober reminder that popularity is fleeting and history forgets even the greatest. Public approval is fickle. To live for applause is to chase the wind — only what's done for God truly endures. Human praise is temporary for what one generation celebrates, the next may criticize or ignore entirely.

Just as Joseph rose to power in Egypt and later was forgotten (Exodus 1:8), so do even the greatest earthly successes eventually fade from memory. Only what's done for God endures.

Ray Stedman - Here is a young man who went through the same difficulties, who had won his way to popularity and power, yet he did not learn those lessons either. Although he had the example of his predecessor, he ultimately lost the respect of others. So even old age, even time, does not always teach us these lessons. It all remains yet, "vanity, emptiness, a striving after wind."

William Barrick ([Ecclesiastes 4 Commentary](#)) Generation after generation, people seek solutions to the problems of humanity in both the social and moral realms. They expend wealth and power on attempting to right society's wrongs. Frustratingly, however, every attempt meets failure. Every "Great Society" eventually collapses and the advances of decades disappear in the dust of another depression, another war, or another natural disaster. Derek Kidner's keen observation about Eccl 4:1-3 provides a potential association between the oppression in Eccl 4:1-3 and the political inconsistencies of Eccl 4:13-16. He notes the paradox that a transfer of power to promote change actually "limits the possibility of reform itself, because the more control the reformer wields, the more it tends to tyranny."**20** The all-inclusive fallen condition of humanity defies self-restoration. As Michael Kelley observes, "The masses willingly support revolution because they cannot believe that the fault lies in them."**21** The indelible sinful nature of fallen mankind prevents the success of setting up the kingdom of God apart from the return of Jesus Christ. Ideal social justice must await the Righteous One Himself.

Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 44.

21 [Michael Kelley, The Burden of God: Studies in Wisdom and Civilization from the Book of Ecclesiastes](#)

(Minneapolis: Contra Mundum Books, 1993), 94.

Oswald Chambers - Solomon says whether you are wise or foolish, upright or not, a king or tyrannised over by a king, successful or a failure, in society or solitary, stubborn or sagacious, all alike ends the same way. All is passing, and we cannot find our lasting joy in any element we like to touch. It is disastrous for a man to try and find his true joy in any phase of truth, or in the fulfilment of ambition, or in physical or intellectual solitariness, or in society; he will find his joy only in a personal relationship to God. That relationship was expounded by Jesus Christ when He said—"If any man cometh unto Me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (rv). Our first concern is to be personally related to God. Jesus Christ is God manifested in human flesh, and we have to ignore to the point of hatred anything that competes with our relationship to Him.. ([Shade of His Hand](#))