

## **Ecclesiastes 4**

### **Prizing Relationships over Wealth and Status**

Introduction:

Good relationships are essential to enjoying life.

Key Verse: Ecclesiastes 4:1 (ESV) 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.

Key Section:

Ecclesiastes 4:9 (ESV) Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

Ecclesiastes 4:10 (ESV) For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

Ecclesiastes 4:11 (ESV) Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (ESV) And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Theme: Good relationships are essential in battling the miseries of this life.

Companionship is more desirable than greed and selfishness.

“From the institution of marriage to the practice of collective bargaining, generations of people have tested the truth of these words. One of God’s great gifts in helping us deal with problems of oppression, poverty, loneliness, and injustice is the company of others.”

Hubbard, David A., and Lloyd J. Ogilvie. Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon. Vol. 16. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1991. Print. The Preacher’s Commentary Series.

- I. From a non-believer's perspective life is not worth living when they are not consoled or comforted in their misery.

- A. We are looking at life from the perspective of a non-believer.

Ecclesiastes 4:1 (ESV) 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.

- B. Here we have the evil of people seeking to get ahead at the expense of others.

Ecclesiastes 4:1 (ESV) **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.

- 1. Oppressions constitute everything on the spectrum from slavery to dipping in line.
    - 2. It includes anything in which the desires of one person are indulged through the indifference to the suffering that it causes in others.

Ecclesiastes 4:1 (ESV) 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.

- 3. The great evil is the indifference to the pain and suffering that one person afflicts upon the other.

Ecclesiastes 4:1 (ESV) 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.**

4. Application:

- a. Again there is a spectrum.
- b. One can learn the lessons from good manners.
- c. A society that is characterized by gentleness (gentlemen) is better than a society cauterized by rudeness.

C. Life is miserable when there is no one to feel sorry for or console those who are taken advantage of, experiencing hardship and trouble.

Ecclesiastes 4:1 (ESV) 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.

D. From an ungodly perspective such an oppressed person is better off dead than alive.

Ecclesiastes 4:2 (ESV) **And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate** than the living who are still alive.

- 1. One can readily see how such thinking would contribute to thoughts of suicide.
- 2. It must be stressed that this conclusion was not the same as that of the apostle Paul's when he thought that it was better to die than to live.

Philippians 1:21 (ESV) For to me to live is Christ, **and to die is gain.**

- 3. Solomon had been living his life for selfish pleasure.

Ecclesiastes 2:10 (ESV) And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.

- a. Now when life was difficult there was no reason to live.
- b. If one lives for pleasure, and there is no pleasure in life, then there is no reason to live.

4. Paul had been living his life for Christ.

Philippians 1:20 (ESV) as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

Philippians 1:21 (ESV) **For to me to live is Christ**, and to die is gain.

- a. Paul was not despairing of life. He saw value in living.

Philippians 1:22 (ESV) **If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.** Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.

- b. Because Paul had been living his life for Christ, death was preferable to life.

Phil 1:23 I am torn between the two: **I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;**

- c. Because Paul had been living his life for Christ, he found reason to live, even through great pain and suffering. He was living not at the expense of others but rather in a spirit of sacrifice for the benefit of others.

Philippians 1:24 (ESV) **But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.**

Philippians 1:25 (ESV) Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,

- E. From an ungodly perspective an oppressed person would be better off having never been born.

Ecclesiastes 4:3 (ESV) But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

1. One can readily see how such thoughts could be used to justify abortion.
2. We see many who despair of life.
3. Even the godly can reach points due to misery where they wish that they had never been born.

Job 3:1 (ESV) After this Job opened his mouth and **cursed the day of his birth.**

Job 3:2 (ESV) And Job said:

Job 3:3 (ESV) “**Let the day perish on which I was born,** and the night that said, ‘A man is conceived.’”

4. In reality Job's life had been a source of great blessing to many. Job saw his life lived for the benefit of others as a justification for living. Job 31
5. Application: when one despairs of life to the point that they wish they had never been born, they are forgetting the way that God has and can continue to still use them.

- F. A person in despair needs a comforter!

Eccl 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.**

1. Certainly God Himself is a great comforter.

2 Corinthians 1:3 (ESV) **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,**

2 Corinthians 1:4 (ESV) **who comforts us in all our affliction,** so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

2. However, the passage before us lays stress on the need for human comforters!

2 Corinthians 1:3 (ESV) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

2 Corinthians 1:4 (ESV) who comforts us in all our affliction, **so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.**

- II. Life is not best lived out of a desire to get ahead of, or to put down, others.
  - A. Much of life's labors are motivated by personal self-interest and a desire to gain supremacy or superiority over others

Ecclesiastes 4:4 (ESV) Then I saw that all toil and all skill in **work** come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.
  - B. Such a selfish motivation provides no meaning to life.

Ecclesiastes 4:4 (ESV) Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. **This also is vanity and a striving after wind.**
  - C. This kind of lifestyle hurts rather than helps the individual who adopts it.

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

- D. Contentment is better than an endless striving to get ahead that causes conflict with others.

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

- E. A life of selfishness is going to alienate others.

- F. Application:

1. Work done in a spirit of generosity brings joy.
2. To do favors for others without pay is a blessing to all.
3. To volunteer one's abilities and labor for the work of the church is a delight to one's self and others.
4. The Christian ethic moves from oppression of others to generosity.

Ephesians 4:28 (ESV) Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, **so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.**

- III. From an ungodly perspective. Work has no meaning when it does not profit others and is not shared with others.

Ecclesiastes 4:7 (ESV) Again, I saw vanity under the sun:

- A. Solomon looks at the person who is all alone in life.

Ecclesiastes 4:8 (ESV) **one person who has no other, either son or brother**, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

B. Nevertheless, this person gives him/herself totally to their work and getting ahead rather than building relationships.

1. The person works hard to get ahead.

Ecclesiastes 4:8 (ESV) one person who has no other, either son or brother, **yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?"** This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

2. The person is never satisfied with his/her attainments.

Ecclesiastes 4:8 (ESV) one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, **and his eyes are never satisfied with riches**, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

3. The person is so busy and self-absorbed that he/she does not take the time to stop and ask the question, "why am I doing all of this?" "Why am I making such sacrifices?" "Who is going to benefit from it?"

Ecclesiastes 4:8 (ESV) one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, **so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?"** This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

C. This results in a futile unenjoyable life at the end.

Ecclesiastes 4:8 (ESV) one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" **This also is vanity and an unhappy business.**

D. Application:



1. Sometimes people are alone through no fault of their own.

Ecclesiastes 4:8 (ESV) one person who has no other, either son **or brother**, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

- a. They greatly desire intimate relationships with others.
- b. This passage is not intended to add to such people's misery.
- c. We should be sensitive to the difficulty that many experience.
- d. Our passage is focusing on situations in which people are choosing obtaining things or status over relationships.

2. Some choose to be alone to increase their wealth.

Eccl 4:8 **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**

3. People who sacrifice family for the sake of career will experience a sense of futility.

- a. Some people choose not to have children because of the expense involved, or the limitations it brings upon their lifestyle.
- b. Some people divorce over finances.
- c. Some people marry for money.
- d. We need to value people more than possessions.

- e. And what good is the wealth when a person needs a comforter? Relationships are far more valuable than possessions.

Eccl 4:8 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!

- f. It is important that we do not limit our understanding of relationships in this passage to simply marriage relationships.

- (1) People cut themselves off from brothers and sisters.

- (2) Some cut themselves off from meaningful friendships and fellowship with others.

4. There is a sadness of life that accompanies such choices.

IV. It is far better to choose companionship than to choose being alone.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 (ESV) Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

- A. Two are better than one for they can get more accomplished when working with someone else.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 (ESV) Two are better than one, **because they have a good reward for their toil.**

- B. Two are better than one for the help that they can provide for each other.

Ecclesiastes 4:10 (ESV) **For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.** But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

- C. Two are better than one for the comfort that they can provide for each other.

Ecclesiastes 4:11 (ESV) Again, if two lie together, **they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?**

- D. Two are better than one for the protection that they can provide for each other.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (ESV) **And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a** threefold cord is not quickly broken.

- E. Three are better than two.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (ESV) And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand **him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.**

- V. It is far better to take the advice of others rather than to pridefully choose to lead alone.

- A. Choosing to lead without taking advice is worse than not leading at all.

Ecclesiastes 4:13 (ESV) Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice.

- B. There are those who may overcome great obstacles and make it all on their own.

Ecclesiastes 4:14 (ESV) For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor.

- C. Such people though surrounded by crowds are nevertheless still all alone.

Ecclesiastes 4:15 (ESV) I saw all the living who move about under the sun, **along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place.**

Ecclesiastes 4:16 (ESV) 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.

- D. That too, ends up being a futile meaningless life.

Ecclesiastes 4:16 (ESV) 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.**

## VI. Conclusion and Application.

- A. We must always guard against the selfish tendencies to put our desires ahead of the needs of others. That is poisonous to every relationship at all levels.

- B. When we are despairing it is not the time to be alone.

Oftentimes people separate themselves from the very help they need.

- C. As God's people we are to be ready to help each other in time of need.

Galatians 6:2 (ESV) Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

- D. We need to realize what a joy and comfort we can be to people's lives.

Job 42:10 After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before.

Job 42:11 All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. **They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him,** and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.

- E. We need to realize how important tangible demonstrations of gifts are in granting comfort to others.

Job 42:11 All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him, **and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.**

- F. Let us not be indifferent to other people's pain and suffering and especially how our life's choices may contribute that pain and suffering.
- G. Also, may we be aware of how our own life's choices contribute to our own pain and suffering.