

Ecc05 – One Is The Loneliest Number – Ecclesiastes 4:4-12

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Ecclesiastes is a book of the Bible usually approached with some trepidation or nervousness. But what we've found as our study has taken roots here, is that Ecclesiastes may be one of the most important books in the Bible for learning how to best *live our lives* "under the sun" as Solomon calls it.

Ecclesiastes tells us the hard truths.

It tells us *what* – in this life – is actually *worth-less* and

It tells us *what* – in this life – has actual *worth*.

I've never taught this book before. But now that I am, I realize how I could have used it really well in my children's lives to help them make sense of what is worthless and what has great worth in this life. Fortunately, somehow God taught my kids and he is still teaching them and their spouses *what* is of *true value* (in this life) and *what* has *no true value* (in this life). And as I watch them all continue to grasp these *great truths* it is one of the greatest blessings God has given me "under the sun".

And, I am also watching them already teaching their own children this difference between what is meaningful and what is meaningless in this life and that is another one of God's greatest blessings to me.

So, here is just the beginning of my "*Greatest Blessings*" list from God.

- 1)** My relationship with JESUS
- 2)** The incredible LOVE of my WIFE (and our relationship)
- 3)** GOD teaching my children the great truths in Ecclesiastes
- 4)** My children teaching their children these same truths

And I am eternally thankful to God for these (and other) great blessings "under the sun".

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, would you show us how much time and effort we spend on things that have no value? Lord, this book is just a hard-hitting book with hard-hitting truths and we need to know and be able to judge and say how much of my life is spent on the hamster wheel of worthlessness. And how much of my time and effort and focus are spent on the greatest blessings you've given us under the sun. And today, Lord, especially the blessings of relationship that you've given us with our family and with close friends. Would you show us how we are prioritizing our relationships versus our working and chasing the wind? Reveal it to us through your Word and by your Spirit, we pray in your name, Jesus, amen.*

For me, Ecclesiastes has helped clarify the truest and highest blessings in this life. We've talked about them in four messages, but today, it's the true blessings of good relationships – of strong, supportive, intertwined relationships with family and with friends.

There are other blessings “under the sun” from God, and we've talked about them and we will continue to talk about them, but all of them – I'm telling you – we have to fight for. Because our normal tendency is to follow after the world. Your normal tendency is to do what the world tells you to do. The greatest blessings in this life have to be fought for. We have to fight to see them and then we have to fight to grab ahold of them and then we have to fight to maintain them.

And although my relationship with the Lord and my family will always top the list, there are also other *great blessings* from God in this life “under the sun”. But to grasp them we have got to fight off the habit of the “hamster wheel of this world” and we've got to commit to *seeing* God's true blessings and we've got to commit to *holding on* to them.

So, Solomon – looking back over his life – (in the midst of some remorse and depression) has been trying to scare us (or shock us) into searching for and finding the true blessings in this life.

And today it is *seeing and developing* the great blessing of strong relationships with family and friends.

As we enter Ecclesiastes Chapter 4 – Solomon is in a “work section” of his *observations about life* and he begins as he usually does with the negative side of his observation.

So, he begins verse 4 looking at the motivation of *why* most of us *work so hard*.

Ecclesiastes 4:4 (NLT)

4 Then I observed that most people are motivated to success because they envy their neighbors. But this, too, is meaningless—like chasing the wind.

Solomon says, really, is it possible that we might be working so hard because we envy the *success* and the *stuff* that other people have and he says *that* is absolutely meaningless and ridiculous.

Envy – by the way – is a huge problem for senior pastors. We far too often get consumed with *wishing and striving and maneuvering* to try to get *our church* to look as *successful* as that other guy's church looks.

It's a real *sickness* of the human nature and Solomon says it is *completely meaningless* – like chasing the wind.

But then in verse 5, Solomon warns of the *other extreme*.

Ecclesiastes 4:5 (NLT)

5 “Fools fold their idle hands, leading them to ruin.”

Meaning you can't just sit around using your Medicinal Card and watch the world go by either.

And then he strikes the balance in Ecclesiastes 4:6.

Ecclesiastes 4:6 (NLT)

6 And yet, “Better to have one handful with quietness (meaning contentment) than two handfuls with hard work and chasing the wind.”

Throughout this entire book Solomon is exhorting us to be happy in our work and to be content in our life and he is reminding us of that great truth here.

But those three verses (verses 4, 5, 6) are just the lead up to our main subject today. So, Solomon says... *work* ... but work for contentment in your life, not out of envy of other people's *success* or *stuff*.

And then in verses 7-8 – Solomon lays out the sad and depressing picture that brings us to our main point today.

Ecclesiastes 4:7–8 (NLT)

7 I observed yet another example of something meaningless under the sun.

8 This is the case of a man who is all alone, (with no companion) without a child or a brother, (with no family) yet who works hard to gain as much wealth as he can. But then he asks himself, “Who am I working for? Why am I giving up so much pleasure now?” *It is all so meaningless and depressing.*

Don't get lost in all the words – let me summarize it for you.

Here is something meaningless . . . a man who WORKS HARD to GAIN WEALTH . . . BUT is all ALONE . . . that is BOTH meaningless and depressing

Solomon is hitting on something huge here, isn't he?

If you are working hard to achieve and succeed and you are alone, then you are most likely either depressed or heading for depression. And you most likely either feel that life is meaningless – or you will be feeling it.

Have you ever known someone who has chosen riches over relationships?

Have you ever known someone who has chosen prosperity over people?

In the end (almost always) *these* are the most *depressed and remorseful* people on the planet.

At the extreme we see in our minds Ebenezer Scrooge in the dark, damp home sitting alone on Christmas Eve with a fire just big enough to add a *slightest warmth* to his cold, lonely life.

The lesson of stories like “A Christmas Carol” is how the rich and the miserly become miserable with their money. But for those of us who aren’t necessarily *rich* or *miserly*. Can we use the lesson of Ebenezer Scrooge *sitting alone* on Christmas Eve to inspire us (to drive us) to develop and care for and protect the *crucial relationship* we have in this life?

I believe *that* is what Solomon is *driving at* here. He’s saying don’t prioritize the “hamster wheel” over the *important relationships* in your life. Don’t miss the *crucial importance* of the relationships you have *right now* because those relationships are one of the few things that actually have *true value and true meaning* in this soon to vaporize world. And those relationships require focus and effort and being prioritized above your running on the “hamster wheel” of life.

So now, Solomon is going to spell this out for us. The following verses are about *not being alone* and they are about *the blessing* of living this life in strong relationships with *family and friends*.

Guys, we are not made to travel the highway of life, alone. When discussing marriage, we know this well from Genesis 2:18 where God says ***It is not good for the man to be alone***. But this truth – is true in every area of life (not just marriage) and while these next verses are used often in weddings, they have a much broader “life application” as well.

It’s so much broader. You see it in the New Testament, in the body and in 1 Corinthians 12 and the spiritual stones and the temple in 1 Peter. And we know that we are Romans 12. And we know that all these truths are “we go together”. We’re made to be together. We’re made to live life together. But is it receiving the priority focus that’s equal to how important it really is?

So, first, Solomon is going to say two are better than one when it comes to working.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 (NLT)

9 Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed.

The NET Bible says - Ecclesiastes 4:9 (NET)

9 Two people are better than one, because they can reap more benefit from their labor.

TWO are better than ONE

Because *they can help each other succeed* (NLT)

Because *they can reap more benefit from their labor* (NET)

I like those translations because I think the verse points to *something more* than money. Yes – two people working together can create more money than each of them working individually. But there’s more to life than that – right?

The most rewarding and successful time I’ve had in business is when I had a friend as a partner. Those were great years, *both* for the business and for our families. We both took *tons of times off* to be with our families and we still made good money, and by the grace of God those were very balanced and peaceful years.

And the most fruitful *this ministry* has ever been is when I’ve had close friends *running the ministry* with me. I wish I could say there have been *balanced and peaceful years* in the ministry here. But even though I’ve yet to find a *life balance* in ministry, still the most rewarding and fruitful days here are the days when I have family and friends serving and sacrificing with me.

And I will tell you the truth right now. After seventeen years of *not having* a great “life balance” (right now) if I did not have an *unshakable family* and if I did not have *very strong friends* serving with me and holding me up I would (literally) *not* be standing here. And I am *eternally thankful* for God *keeping me standing here*. And he is doing that by daily using *my committed family and my strong friends* in the ministry (some of whom are in this room now).

And that is exactly what is Solomon says next. He says *two* are better than *one* when it comes to walking down the long path of life.

Ecclesiastes 4:10 (NLT)

***10 If one person falls* (while walking down the path of life), *the other can reach out and help*. *But someone who falls alone is in real trouble*.**

Again, I'll just speak personally to you. I have spent *far too much time* going about life *alone* – both in business and in ministry, and I have paid a dear price for it (and my family has as well). But in my older and weaker years, I have realized (more and more) my desperate need not only for a strong family but also for close, strong friends to follow Jesus with me. And my prayer is that you would realize that (in your life) long before you even begin to see the older and weaker years coming on the road ahead.

I believe Ecclesiastes was written for young adults, much like Proverbs and Song of Solomon.

Solomon is trying to point us in the *right direction before* we get too far down *the wrong path*, because sometimes it can be a long, long road back on to the right path. Guys, we need people walking in life with us, them holding *us* up and us holding *them* up. I'm talking about relationships with both family and friends that *are real*, that we *invest into*, that we can *count on* – because we are walking on a long road.

And at some point, we're going to need someone to *hold us up* and at some point, we're going to need to be "*the holder-upper*".

Next, Solomon says *two* are better than *one* when it come to *cold, dark nights*. Now get ready, because I'm about to answer a question that some of you have been wondering about since the 70's. *What is a three-dog night?* If you say "a great rock band" with a hit song that happens to match the title of this message, you would only be half-right.

A "three-dog night" is an Australian Outback saying referring to a night *so cold* you need three dogs around you to stay warm. But it's actually used mostly *as a metaphor* for long, cold, *difficult nights*.

Ecclesiastes 4:11 (NLT)

11 Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone?

When you are facing a *three-dog night* you need someone with you. It's true enough on *physically cold nights*, but even more true on *metaphorically cold nights*.

Most of us don't like to be alone, especially when we're in *difficulty* – especially when we're surviving *long, dark nights of the soul*. We need to know someone is *there with us*. *And* (at least partly) *because* they are there with us, we know that we'll get through that *long, dark night*.

And finally, Solomon says *two are better than one when it comes to war*.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NLT)

12 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.

Have you noticed... sometimes *life is a battle* and if you try to “go it alone” you can be easily “taken out” by your enemy because we weren’t meant to fight this *battle of life* alone.

The only solo battle plans are for super-heroes in Marvel comic books. In the real world we need someone standing with us, *watching our back* in order to conquer the enemy. And two are great in the battle of life, but *three are even better* – because a triple braided cord is not easily broken.

That is *so true* in a marriage with Jesus Christ being the third cord. But it is also true in family and friends where our strong relationships with one another *enable us* to keep fighting *the good fight*.

Guys... the point of this entire text is *one is the loneliest number – don’t do it*. Do not go through life without building strong relationships with *family and friends* and do everything you can to *not tear* those relationships down.

Instead, *invest in – sacrifice for – and build up* the relationships you have with family and friends.

In the end, Solomon figured out not only were these relationships *crucial for life* but they were also one of *God’s greatest blessings* – “under the sun”

Let’s pray. *Lord, Jesus, would you just do that? Do what you just did. Shake us up that we would re-prioritize the relationships in our lives. That we would re-focus. That we would re-evaluate – or maybe evaluate for the first time. How much time and effort are we spending on stuff that is going to vaporize? And how much time and effort are we spending on the greatest blessings you’ve given us in this life? At the top of which, just under you Jesus, are the relationships we have with our family and friends. May we re-prioritize as necessary. May we repent as required and may we re-focus our lives, Lord, on what’s truly important, on what’s critically important and on what is the greatest one of the greatest blessings you’ve given us under the sun. Show us, Lord, the relationships in our lives that need work.*

Can I just give you one minute to allow the Holy Spirit to pull up a relationship in your mind? Show you a face. Maybe it’s a family member, maybe it’s a friend. Maybe it’s a

pastor. But something is wrong there and it needs to be made right. There's something that needs to be forgiven or repented of. Something that needs to be restored. Listen to me please, it is worth it. And you can fight and wrestle with God and throw your tantrum, but you must be obedient. That face that the Holy Spirit is showing you right now, you must commit to do something to restore or invest in that relationship. Would you just commit to do that?

Would you just say, *“Lord, I commit? I commit to obedience. You've shown me a person or people that I must invest in, I must protect, I must guard. I must restore, I must repent to. I commit to you, Lord, in the eyes of heaven I commit to invest and protect the relationships that are one of the greatest blessings you've given me on earth. In your name, Jesus, amen.*