

Eccl. 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.*

At this point Solomon takes note of how unfair life seems to be. All around he can observe people being mistreated by wicked men. The Hebrew for the word “oppress” makes reference to one who would defraud, violate, deceive and do violence to others. He also observed that all the power seemed to be on the side of the oppressors and that there was no one looking out for the oppressed; they had no comforter—no one to console them or avenge them.

I think most everyone in America and throughout the world today can identify with Solomon’s observation. More often than not, those with power and influence get by with wrongdoing simply because they have money and/or position to bribe and/or manipulate the powers that be. Sometimes we can’t help but wonder why God allows these people to prosper. That thinking is just another cop out that places blame on God and refuses to recognize our own responsibility in allowing such wicked men to prosper as a result of our apathy and/or refusal to take action to hold them accountable.

Other men of faith struggled with these same thoughts, but Solomon’s own father, David, clearly understood the truth.

Psalms 73:11-18 “And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; **Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.** Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.”

As I continued to think about this, I was reminded that Solomon was known as an oppressive king according to those who advised his son Rehoboam upon assuming throne.

1Kings 12:9-11 “And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter? And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, **Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father’s loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.**”

It is always easier to point out someone else’s sin while refusing to admit our own. It seems that Solomon was not much better than the politicians in America today. They seem to be quite adept at pointing out the injustice practiced by

others according to their own perceptions while refusing to acknowledge their own wrong actions and/or choosing to justify them as necessary for a higher good. They choose to live by the motto that the end justifies the means.

Eccl. 4:2-3 Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

Solomon goes on to rationalize that the dead are better off than those who are alive, and that the unborn is even better off than either those who are dead or alive. Solomon isn't the only person in the bible to express such thoughts. I am reminded of the words of Job and Jeremiah.

Job 3:11-13 "Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? Why did the knees prevent me? or why the breasts that I should suck? For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest...."

Jeremiah 20:14-18 "Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide; Because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?"

This is a really pathetic outlook on life. This type of thinking is a direct result of allowing circumstances to take our focus off the Lord and His will for us and turn that focus on self and our own will. It is God's will to bless us abundantly if we will but live in submission to His will as LORD.

Psalms 84:11 "For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

Joshua 1:8 "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

The key is in refusing to allow expectation to stumble our faith. We should rest in trust of God's faithfulness to His Word according to His timing and purpose period—no other expectations attached.

Eccl. 4:4 ¶ Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

I think the NLT makes the meaning of this verse a bit clearer: *“Then I observed that most people are motivated to success by their envy of their neighbors. But this, too, is meaningless, like chasing the wind.”*

At least, Solomon recognizes that there is no true fulfillment or eternal purpose to be found through such endeavor.

Again, this is a pretty sad commentary on the character of man; but without God as Lord of your life, man’s motivation has to find root in the things of the world—things with no eternal benefit. I believe that pride is the root of all sin. When we reject God as Lord, we automatically place ourselves in that position. Therefore, everything we do is rooted in wanting to exalt “me” and to garner the admiration of others, accumulate possessions, and attain power and influence.

I couldn’t help but think of the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 6:19-21 “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

And the words of the Apostle John.

1John 2:16-17 “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

And the words of Peter.

1Peter 5:6 “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:”

Eccl. 4:5-6 The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh. Better is an handful *with* quietness, than both the hands full *with* travail and vexation of spirit.

Not everyone is motivated to “go for the gold.” Some decide that the rat race just isn’t worth it. In fact, they go to the other extreme. They are content to settle for whatever comes their way rather than to invest their time and energy in hard work to even provide for themselves.

I couldn’t help but think of those who abuse the welfare system today and are content to live off handouts rather than work for a living. They seem to have no sense of shame in taking advantage of hardworking men and women. This is not an indictment against the truly needy or those who need a helping hand in between jobs. I just don’t understand how our government doesn’t seem to understand that they are promoting laziness and dependency rather than motivating people to work hard and become independent as they seem to be intent on taking us on the fast track to socialism.

Scripture is clear in declaring the importance of hard work and sharing with the truly needy.

Proverbs 6:6-8 "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest."

Ephesians 4:28 "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."

1Thessalonians 4:11-12 "And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing."

2Thessalonians 3:10-12 "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."

Even according to earthly wisdom, Solomon realizes that one is better off to find contentment in working for what you actually need to support yourself and your family rather than putting yourself through the stress and frustration that often accompanies what the world calls success.

Eccl. 4:7-8 ¶ Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.

It would seem that an ambitious, hard working single man caught Solomon's attention; and he couldn't help but wonder why he would be so driven and not take time to enjoy life. He didn't have anyone to share his success. His only purpose in life is to accumulate more wealth. It was obvious to Solomon that this was a useless endeavor in the ongoing scheme of things. This man would end up going to the grave having only the satisfaction of having accumulated so much—and he certainly couldn't take it with him as scripture affirms.

Job 1:20-21 "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

1Timothy 6:7 "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

Eccl. 4:9-12 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him *that is* alone when he falleth; for *he hath* not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm *alone*? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Solomon concludes that having a companion to work with and share in life is much preferable to being alone. When the going gets tough, it is good to have a partner to help pick you up and get you going again. It's hard to find self-motivation when you feel defeated; it's always helpful to get encouragement and support from someone else. Two can provide comfort to one another, while a person alone has no one to comfort him/her. A person alone is vulnerable to the attack of an enemy; a team of two, however, is not so vulnerable. Stands to reason that a team of three is even better than two.

Though not the specific context, these are beautiful verses to consider when thinking of marriage. Finding the right life partner is a wonderful thing. It clearly gives one a sense of strength and confidence in facing whatever life might throw your way. The obvious application to the Lord as the third cord in your relationship should give the Christian couple a strong sense of peace and security as they trust Him to guide and protect them according to His will. They can be confident that He will allow nothing to touch them that isn't meant for good.

Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

I think it is significant to note that the reference is to a "cord," a single string or rope made of several strands. In other words, the key to its strength and function is in its unity.

Eccl. 4:13-14 ¶ Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also *he that is* born in his kingdom becometh poor.

Well, the translations certainly read quite differently on these verses. I tend to think that the NLT translation makes the most sense until the last phrase: *"It is better to be a poor but wise youth than to be an old and foolish king who refuses all advice. Such a youth could come from prison and succeed."*

I think the last part of verse 14 is saying that the foolish king could end up poor as a result of refusing to listen to counsel.

The key observation Solomon is making is that there is wisdom to be found in realizing that all of us are subject to fault and in need of correction and counsel sometimes. Though not specifically stated, the implication is that one should be open to the correction and counsel of wise and respected men.

I decided to pull out an old book, The New Dictionary of Thoughts, to see if there were some good quotes on the subject and found a couple that I thought were applicable.

Diogenes – “Wise kings generally have wise counselors; and he must be a wise man himself who is capable of distinguishing one.”

Bacon – “All precepts concerning kings are comprehended in these: remember thou art a man; remember thou art God’s viceregent.”

Ecc. 4:15-16 I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. *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.*

These verses continue in context with the preceding two. He seems to be thinking in reference to observation of a neighboring kingdom, though he may just be following a scenario through in his thoughts. My brain goes off on such tangents at times, and I couldn’t help but find application to the current political scenario in America today.

An intelligent and charismatic new young ruler of the next generation rises to power with the support of an adoring public who is fed up with the “old ruler” whose time of leadership is perceived by many as having been filled with unwise decisions and in disregard of the advice of those who perceive themselves to be wiser and more experienced.

In Solomon’s consideration, the new young ruler will also lose his popularity as the people find fault with his choices and the actions he takes and the next generation emerges on the scene. The cycle is doomed to continue because men are fallible and proud. A couple of the translations describe this cycle as “chasing the wind,” one that will never produce a satisfying result. As Christians, we know that to be a valid observation. Without acknowledging God as LORD and living according to the truth of His word, man’s efforts will always fall far short of expectation and true success.