

Relationships without Christ are Meaningless

Series: Finding the Meaning of Life

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Introduction: Open your Bible to Ecclesiastes 4. Tonight we continue in our series called “Finding the Meaning of Life”. Tonight we are going to find out that “Relationships without Christ are Meaningless”.

Relationships with friends, family, work, and within our culture and society are very important to us. The reason we love friendship is because we were created to exist in community. God has existed as a Trinity with love and communication and friendship. False religions have postulated that God created us because He was lonely. That’s not true. God is not lacking in anything. He is self-sufficient and supremely satisfied in and of Himself. Without a close walk with Christ, all our relationships are vain.

I. In fact, all Human Relationships are potentially **Dangerous** (Verse 1-3).

A. *We are all prone to abuse the power and gifts God gives to us* (vs. 1).

Verse 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”.

There is a danger with all relationships. Because we are all born depraved and selfish, there is the great possibility that we will all use the power and gifts and advantages that have been granted to us by the sovereign hand of God to our own self-exaltation and the oppression of others.

The “power” spoken of in verse 1 are the God-given strengths and gifts and blessings and advantages that none of us have earned. It could be position or possessions or some kind of gifting. We all have a stewardship to use our gifts for the glory of God and for the good of others.

Because of our innate selfishness, man without Christ, if he is not held accountable, he is prone to oppression and abuse.

Someone said, “Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely”.

B. *Abuse is so bad, it is better to be dead in Christ or never to have existed* (vs. 2-3). **Verses 2-3**, “And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. 3 But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.”

Paul said “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (**Philippians 1:21**). It is true that for believers, “the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive”. God’s saints in heaven, our departed friends, are alive and well. Though their bodies have died and lay in the earth, they are more alive than ever and full of happiness.

The history of the human race is one of great abuse and oppression.

- Think of child prostitution today.
- Slavery and human trafficking is alive and well today. There are 600,000-800,000 trafficked internationally each year. The maximum sentence for human trafficking is only 20 years!
- 20,000 people a year are murdered in the US alone. Only 10,000 murderers are caught.

For those who are oppressed and abused on earth, Solomon says it is better that they would never have existed. Solomon is not speaking of the spiritual side of life, but only the troubles of “life under the sun”. Considering that, Solomon has already addressed life after death in chapter **3:17**, “I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work”.

Certainly, for those who reject Christ, it is better that they would never have been born. Without Christ, relationships turn out to be a DISASTER in this life.

Consider how some of the most successful people in terms of earthly success can’t handle relationships.

- I heard today that Al and Tipper Gore are filing for divorce.
- Listen, we are all so messed up, that without Christ’s help, we are prone to become abusive or selfish or malicious in our relationships.

Without Christ, because of man’s depravity and selfishness, all relationships are potentially dangerous. But with Christ, relationships can be redeemed and restored!

Transition: Solomon now specifically mentions problems with work relationships.

II. **Certainly, Our Work Relationships can be Difficult** (verses 4-8).

God created work for man before the fall. Work is good. It glorifies God. But if a person does not know Christ, then work becomes an idol, or a way of supplying money for all the idols in life. That’s what verse 4 is talking about. Without Christ, we cannot have a proper perspective concerning our jobs.

A. Work relationships are difficult because of **Jealousy**. **Verse 4**, “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”.

You see, work is not the problem. It is our **heart** that is the problem.

Mark 7:21, “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

The problem is, we bring our heart to work. The motives the lost person has for working, according to Solomon, are **selfish**. He wants to be envied.

Those without their life fixed on Christ are motivated by the competition to have the latest and the greatest and to outdo others. They are **jealous** and **envious** to have the number one place. And this envy can never ever be satisfied. That’s why people who live without Christ are so unhappy. They can never work enough to have enough to satisfy what they really need. And what they need is Christ.

There was an article from the Wall Street Journal trying to figure out who the happiest people in America are. Their conclusion was that the people who are happiest are not people who have spent time, money and energy acquiring things. Those are some of the most unhappy people because possessions lose their luster and value after a while.

Without Christ we have a temptation to make popularity our idol. We want people to envy us. This is the way of the world.

Young people see through this. You’ll find that kids who are given everything from their parents so that they can actually be the envy of everyone else, really don’t love their parents. Because they would rather have their parents love than have this empty envy and popularity. Deep inside popularity and envy do not satisfy.

So the parents work and work for toys for themselves and toys for their kids, and everybody hates each other. This is what life is without Christ.

Here’s another reason work is difficult.

B. Work relationships are difficult because of **Laziness**. **Verse 5**, “The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.”

It’s wrong to have too much ambition in life, but it is also wrong to have no ambition in life. Those with no ambition in life are simply LAZY.

Lazy people are people that don’t want to work. You do all you can to get someone a job, and they quit and blame it on the manager. Lazy people don’t care about relationships. They care about their comfort. They’re life sucking human beings that require other people to feed them. Can I tell you that as long as

you are enabling someone not to take responsibility in life, you are hurting them and hurting yourself.

We have a generation of lazy young people. They have been enabled. They are at home until they're 30. They need to get to a point where they are so desperate that they are almost ready to eat their own flesh. Lazy people need to hit bottom.

One of the ways you can glorify God is by not enabling lazy people. They are usually in our own families. But if we are ever going to get through to their heart, they've got to hit rock bottom.

- C. Work relationships are difficult because of **Dissatisfaction** (vs. 6-8). **Verse 6**, "**Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind**". So many people do not live in the quiet contentment of what God has given them.

It is estimated that a person will spend about 100,000 hours at employment in his life time, and that's only a 43 hour work week. Most of us work plenty more than that. Work occupies a lot of our life.

God created work before the fall. **Genesis 2:15**, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it." We can be satisfied with work ONLY IF WE ARE SATISFIED WITH GOD.

1 Timothy 6:6, "Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment,"

1. **Most people are living for tomorrow**—working and striving for something that doesn't exist. **Verse 6**, "**Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind**".

People are dissatisfied. They are looking for some greener grass. I've said it before—if you want greener grass, start watering your own!

Illustration (Katie): When Katie was born, I couldn't wait for her to grow up. Now she's 11, and I wish she'd slow down. I'm trying to enjoy every minute. We need to enjoy life right now. Each moment is precious. We all need that "handful of quietness". You may not have much, but you don't need much. There's a song I love—"Little is Much When God is in it".

*Little is much when God is in it
Labor not for wealth or fame
There's a crown and you can win it
If you'll go in Jesus' name*

The crown doesn't cost any earthly money. But it will take your heart focusing on treasures in heaven.

2. **Outside of Christ we can never be satisfied.** Verses 7-8, “Again, I saw vanity under the sun: 8 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”.

There are so many people who are so caught up in work, they never ask why they are working so hard. They are never satisfied, but they keep working, hoping to find satisfaction. The Greek philosopher Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”¹

Most people 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?” What is my goal?

The goal for the Christian, in work and in all things is NOT to please ourselves but to please Jesus Christ.

- III. Right Relationships are a **Delight**. Right relationships in life bring trust and help and joy in Christ.

- A. Two are better when it comes to **walking**. Verse 9-10, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. 10 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!” What we are talking about is **accountability**.

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. 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.²

What we are talking about is accountability.

- B. Two are better when it comes to **warmth**. Verse 11, “Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?” Solomon is not just speaking of a physical principle. It is true. But what he’s talking about is **encouragement**.

I think we can make an application to us that when that spiritual winter comes for you, and it is coming for you, when it gets here, no matter how cold, being truly

¹Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1990). *Be satisfied* (Ec 4:4). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

²Ibid.

known by others will keep you warm. Somebody told me one of the reasons we have a warm church is because of testimony time.

We need that openness and warmth in our church. That's God's way for having relationships. **We need to have that servant's heart in our church.** If someone asks you to do something in an area of service you should really have a serious reason if you are going to turn it down, like you're going to have brain surgery or something.

- C. Two are better when it comes to **watchcare**. Verse 12, "And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken." What Solomon is talking about here is **community**.

It was dangerous for anyone to travel alone, day or night; most people traveled in groups for fellowship and for safety.³ If you start neglecting the fellowship of the saints you are going to fall. You will start getting attacked by the "counsel of the ungodly", and then you'll "stand in the way of sinners" and then you'll "sit in the seat of scoffers" (Psalm 1:1).

IV. Finally, we come to understand that Political Relationships are not **Dependable**.

There are some people who listen more to "Pastor Hannity" and "Pastor Beck" and "Pastor Limbaugh" than they do to their own pastor. Do you understand that in our day, we can put so much of our emotional energy into political relationships that really make little difference for the kingdom of Christ. Solomon warns us to be careful because the political landscape is known to be quite unstable and constantly changing.

Check out **verses 13-16**, "Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice. 14 For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. 15 I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. 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."

Political stars come and go. We need to be careful not to get Jesus' kingdom agenda mixed up with earthly agendas.

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). It's great to vote, to be informed, to voice God-glorifying opinions. But be careful. Almost always it is NOT your political connections that matter. We can spend so much time talking politics, watching the news, but what about spending time with your family, serving your church. Our agenda is much greater than anything congress is passing.

³Ibid.

Jesus commanded us to “Go...and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”⁴

Conclusion: 2 questions...

- **How is YOUR relationship with Christ?** So let’s talk about the most important relationship of all. How is your walk with Christ? Are you meeting with Him in His Word? Do you hear His voice. All other relationships in your life will be vain if that one is not right.
- **What good is any relationship if it is not connected to Christ?** No matter who you are connected with, all relationships are meaningless if you’re not right with the One who made you and loves you and died for you. Without accountability to Christ—without the “fear of the LORD” in our lives, we will be prone to every abuse in our relationships. Let’s glorify God with all the people He’s put into our lives!

⁴ Matthew 28:19-20.