

ECCLESIASTES SERIES

Chapter 4 Needing Community

<https://albertmohler.com/2018/02/28/briefing-2-28-18/>

EX: David Brooks NYT column re: Al Mohler Wed 28th Briefing- Ivy League Students- In a tour of upper crust competitive colleges and universities, Brooks found students with a subtle hunger for a change in the emotional tenor of life. "We're more connected but more apart", said one student. They expressed hunger for social and emotional bonding. One student asked, "HOW DO YOU CREATE RELATIONSHIP?" That may be the longing that undergirds all others.

Social media connection is not the same as face to face corporate interaction. One can have hundreds of FB "friends" and still be lonely. As broken people living in a fallen world we all share in the sense of angst and loneliness that can plague us as humans.

But it's not all despair and "hebel" as we see in scripture, even in Ecclesiastes.

Review

. Kaiser Jr., Walter

- There is nothing inherently good in a person per se.
- No one can really appreciate even such elementary things as eating and drinking apart from a personal relationship with the living God.
- God alone—not things or wisdom—is the giver of satisfaction and joy.
- God also gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to those who please Him.
- In contrast to this, we see how far off the mark is every other pursuit. The question of 1:3, as to what does life in and of itself profit a person can now be answered. Kaiser Jr., Walter C. Coping with Change –

From 4:1 to 10:20 it is not as easy to develop a clear line of argument. We begin a section that sounds more like Proverbs with short groupings of saying dealing with various aspects of life. There are some themes that we can group together, but the skeleton is less evident.

Chapter 4

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*. 2 So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. 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.

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. 5 The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. 6 One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.

7 Then I looked again at vanity under the sun. 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.

9 Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. 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. 11 Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm *alone*? 12 And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three *strands* is not quickly torn apart.

13 A poor yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows *how* to receive instruction. 14 For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his

kingdom. 15 I have seen all the living under the sun throughto the side of the second lad who replaces him. 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.

The Teacher sees four things: he sees folk who are oppressed with no one to comfort them; he sees people making money but they are still unhappy; he sees people with power and influence and still have no real support; and he sees people trying to live their lives but have no friends.

He sees all of this And Solomon goes, “How can you handle life on Earth when there’s pain and oppression and everything seems to be falling apart and then no one really has genuine concern for anyone? Everybody just wants to stand at the center of their own universe.” Michael Eaton

4:1-16 Aspects of the need for companionship

The theme song for this chapter is “One Is the Loneliest Number” (Harry Nilsson/ Three Dog Night)

There is a very dark somber mood in Ecclesiastes 4.

4:1-3 Oppression without comforters

The preacher goes back anew to the topic of oppression being done “under the sun.” He refers to the tears of the oppressed.

The Bible is a book that deals with reality – real hardships, real pain, real tears, and real cries of the soul among those who are hurting. IT’S OK TO CRY OUT TO God. The Israelites were not shy about shedding tears for the oppressed, the poor, the downtrodden, the afflicted, the fatherless and the widow.

The Bible is a loud book, or it would be if we read it with the level of emotion that is expressed in it – sadness, grief, and joy. It’s not a book for the stoic or the emotionally repressed. (Frozen chosen)

The Psalms are filled with cries of the soul because of oppression and injustice. We live in a world where there are many oppressors with power, so we should not be shocked by the cries and tears of God’s people. It was so in the days of the “teacher” and it is so today. That is one reason why we should make the persecuted church a focus of prayer.

v. 2-3 really press into the “under the sun” idea – A godless world under the sun leads one to questions the value of even living or of being born.

Camus – Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy

An interview with Jordan Peterson;

They were discussing the recent violence in our society.

Why is this happening? “Because young men are nihilistic and desperate.” (stuck in Eccles 4:1-3

Why?

Life can make you that way unless you have a purpose and a destiny. There is no shortage of suffering in life and it is easy for young people to become embittered by that. If they don’t see a way out they become

angry and turn against life itself and make a display of their hatred for being by killing the innocent. ... there is a psychological epidemic. These people keep track of each other and there is a kind of competition. They are driven by a desire for notoriety because that is better than being ignored. We underestimate the need for young people to have a clear sense of direction and purpose. They need something to offset the tragedy of life. We need to take the philosophical and even religious issues seriously, but we don't.

**NOTE: There is no real attempt at a solution to the problem in these verses.

The world is full of pain. The world is full of sadness. The world is full of sorrow. Turn on the news media, not the glossy, two minute sound bite media, but turn on to the real news out there, and the world is full of pain.

And Solomon is observing the world; not his world, but the world without God, the world without Jesus, the world without hope, and the world in which there is oppression. The description of natural man without God is "helpless and hopeless" Life can be unfair, and there is so much injustice. That's the first picture given in chapter 4. And it is even worse when we face it alone. One is the loneliest number.

EX: white church during the Atlanta Missing Children crisis 1979-81. They wanted to do something for the kids in the area so they set up a basketball goal. It was simple, but it created community for scared kids.

In the face of the oppression and despair we may turn to work, but it can ALSO be lonely

4-6 Work that is lonely

We can call it a Lonesome rivalry. We work to impress others. That may be why we wear what we wear, drive what we drive, drink or eat what we do, or why we DON'T wear, drive, drink or eat what we don't.

It can be success without happiness. The desire to keep up with, or get ahead of, the Joneses is a prime motivation for many people to work and succeed.

"Envy toward one's neighbor" is a problem of the human condition, and it leads to loneliness.

Here's the question: **Have you ever found yourself at some quiet, deep place celebrating someone else's failures?** No? I haven't either. I've heard of it. There is even a word for it, in German - **Schadenfreude-- "Pleasure derived by someone from another person's misfortune."**

That can be a problem, and another is rivalry and competition - they both lead to isolation. They derail community and close relationships - (remember the students at the competitive colleges)

EX: movies about the neighbors competing for the best Christmas decorations- National Lampoon Christmas.

Another way to deal with the rivalry, depression, and despair is to give up...

Verse 5 flips to the guy who drops out with indifference- becomes idle. Forget the rat race, I'll just drop out. This is a form of self-cannibalism - "he consumes his own flesh". He eats away at his own life - his abilities, his energies, his well-being and his self-respect.

And the final analysis is that he is a "fool."

Verse 6 gives the anti-dote to v. 4 and 5 One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after the wind. This is the way to avoid the grasping rat race of v 4 and the escapism of v 5. The way of wisdom is to attempt much (one handful), but not too much (two hands full), and so will find life within its

grasp not an impossible strain. How such a life is attained is the underlying theme of Ecclesiastes. – Michael Eaton

:7ff Man without companionship of family

This is the man with neither friend nor close relative. He's successful but is not satisfied. Work and a love for money and power will kill community and companionship

Scrooge – he has a woman who loves him, and he loves, and then he gave his heart to another- Money. He cuts himself off from her, his family, his nephew, others in business.

Mr. Potter IAWL “You're a warped pathetic old man”

Cat's in the Cradle – Harry Chapin. Do you know the lyrics of this song by Harry Chapin, actually inspired by a poem written by his wife. It's not a “Christian” song, but it is very much in line with Ecclesiastes

Who has NEVER heard it???

Men without friends is a major problem in our culture. BOSTON GLOBE 3/9/17 **THE BIGGEST problem facing middle men isn't smoking or obesity. It's loneliness.

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/men-dont-have-enough-friends--and-its-affecting-their-health/news-story/336a071a43c8af615b7bb296758f3ebd>

Men don't have enough friends, and it's affecting their health.

So we can bury ourselves in our work, or we can fold our hands and give up, but God has another way to deal with the “hebel” in the world. ...v. 9

It is well known and has been around for 3,000 years and has been used a lot by people in weddings or engagement announcements, and that is fine, but that is not the main intent of this verse. It is talking about the blessing of community and companionship for God's people.

** You need it whether you think you do or not.

:9-12 Proverbs on the blessing of companionship :

It is good to have a companion when adversity comes, and it will come. Mishap, adversity or hostility happen.

Strength doesn't come by our growing independence, but rather our growing dependence. V. 12

** This underscores the need for community groups and relationships.

Wendell Berry wrote, “Community will start again when people begin to do necessary things for each other again.”

“Neighbors bring food with death and flowers with sickness and little things in between. Boo was our neighbor. He gave us two soap dolls, a broken watch and chain, a pair of good-luck pennies, and our lives. But neighbors give in return. We never put back into the tree what

we took out of it: we had given him nothing, and it made me sad.” – Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird

Which one are you? The one who gives or the one who takes but never gives back in return?

The cord of three strands is not referring to the Trinity, but it is valid to note that God exists in community – Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Being made in His image means that we too are made for community.

Living in isolation leads to a self-centered focus which derails community. EX: **CS Lewis – Hell is eternal autobiography.**

The thing about your blind spots is you can't see them. If you can't see where you're weak and prone to fall, how are you going to keep yourself from falling? Once again, praise God for men and women who will know you in such a way that they're not afraid to walk up to you and go, "I'm nervous for you, man. I see this thing here. I'm nervous for you." I find that few people ever have friends like that, the kind that love you enough to confront you.

If we know the Bible at all, we should know that we must not simply trust our own judgement. Prov 11 and 15 instruct us that there is wisdom and safety with an abundance of counselors.

The question is, "Why do so few of us have relationships like this?" We all know we should. But why do so many of us not have these kind of relationships? Why do so many of us find it so difficult to walk in this kind of deep, spiritual, life giving fellowship with other believers? Why is it so difficult?

How do we get it? You may be thinking, "I've been here and I see that some have it and I must not have the secret handshake." How do I get the kind of relationships that the "teacher" is talking about? There is no easy answer. The best I can do is point you in a direction and say, "If you stay on the path it can happen one day."

"How far and how long?" I DON'T KNOW, but I do know that if you don't get into the flow of where it is happening, it won't happen.

"Where is that flow?" Community groups, men's, ladies', youth events, Sunday School, events for church or community connecting. IT IS MORE THAN just coming to worship.

13-16 A glimpse of a lonely king

IN OT culture, the old are regarded as wise, but here we see that an old king can become foolish when he no longer receives instruction.

*We are never too old to learn from God

EX: Ann Wilson at WPC, elderly godly woman who had a fall. "I wonder what God wants to teach me through this?"

You can be on the top of the world in one season, and escorted out of the office or corridors of power the next.

And there is only one who can make sense of this sin-ridden world, and that is Jesus Christ. And what Ecclesiastes 4 is saying is that there's another kind of life—not life under the sun; not life in this world

without God, but life in union and communion with Jesus. You may not make it to the top in this world; you may not have all of the bling that the world affords, but if you have *Jesus*, you have everything.

Through Christ we are called into the ultimate community of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

AMEN

CAT'S IN THE CRADLE – Harry Chapin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etundhQa724>

My child arrived just the other day,
He came to the world in the usual way.
But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay.
He learned to walk while I was away.
And he was talking 'fore I knew it, and as he grew,
He'd say, "I'm gonna be like you, dad.
You know I'm gonna be like you."

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon,
Little boy blue and the man in the moon.
"When you coming home, **dad**?" "I don't know when,
But we'll get together then.
You know we'll have a good time then."

My son turned ten just the other day.
He said, "Thanks for the ball, dad, come on let's play.
Can you teach me to throw?" I said, "Not today,
I got a lot to do." He said, "That's ok."
And he walked away, but his smile never dimmed,
Said, "I'm gonna be like him, yeah.
You know I'm gonna be like him."

Chorus

"When you coming home, **dad**?" "I don't know when,
But we'll get together then.
You know we'll have a good time then."

Well, he came from college just the other day,
So much like a man I just had to say,
"Son, I'm proud of you. Can you sit for a while?"
He shook his head, and he said with a smile,

"What I'd really like, dad, is to borrow the car keys.
See you later. Can I have them please?"

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon,
Little boy blue and the man in the moon.
"When you coming home, son?" "I don't know when,
But we'll get together then, dad.
You know we'll have a good time then."

I've long since retired and my son's moved away.
I called him up just the other day.
I said, "I'd like to see you if you don't mind."
He said, "I'd love to, dad, if I could find the time.
You see, my new job's a hassle, and the kid's got the flu,
But it's sure nice talking to you, dad.
It's been sure nice talking to you."
And as I hung up the phone, it occurred to me,
He'd grown up just like me.
My boy was just like me.

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon,
Little boy blue and the man in the moon.
"When you coming home, son?" "I don't know when,
But we'll get together then, dad.
You know we'll have a good time then."

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