

Shall we open our Bibles to Ecclesiastes 4 this morning, as we continue this book of Solomon's that is part of the section of the Old Testament known as the books of wisdom or the books of poetry?

They start at the book of Job; they finish at the Song of Solomon. And they're unique in the sense that they are always focused on your present-tense relationship with God. There isn't really prophecy found in them. There isn't really any intent to rehash the past. It's all about a present-tense walk with God, and every one of those books assumes that you, as you read them, have an interest in doing better with the Lord daily. Also, these books tackle the big issues of life. The book of Job is dedicated to talking about why the righteous suffer. The book of Psalms, for the most part, is prayers of others (David and many others) that you get to listen in on and see how they prayed and what God did as a result. And oftentimes we are given the situation in which they prayed those prayers. So, it helps you to learn about praying and reaching God's throne. Solomon, writing Proverbs, as well as others, gives us much wisdom for daily life.

And then, we get to this book. Solomon, a man who knew the Lord - God had given him wisdom and blessed him greatly - in the later years of his life, he married a bunch of women for political reasons and others that turned his heart away from God. And so he went on a quest, and he had the finances and the power, the resources, to not withhold anything in the world. And he took a pen and paper with him, and he kept a journal, and he wrote down these words. This is a hunt for life "under the sun." And by the time we're done, he will get it right. In fact, there are times he surfaces, like last week, and he talks about what he remembers as he looks at life over the sun, where God rules. But often, he has gone down these quests - from having to buying to owning to creating. He tries everything that the world has to give. It's the best book for witnessing to the lost, I think, because literally everything that someone in the world apart from God seeks after, you will find Solomon seeking after. And you will see his analysis, if you will.

So, this morning, we'd like to just look at chapter 4. Last week we looked at chapter 3 toward the end, and Solomon had one of those short bursts of insight. He was talking about standing on Mt. Spiritual versus Mt. Skeptical. You

remember? But this morning, Solomon goes back to his analysis. Now, we had told you in chapter 2:12 that up until then Solomon experienced things. He threw himself into it. He went out with it. But then, he said, "Well, I could probably make some of these determinations just by observing and analyzing and looking at life." And so he turns to his considerations, and he'll mention that in verse 1 here.

And this morning, we want to look at what the world does and what God wants to do in terms of your relationship with others. And we're going to discover that the world, because of sin, is bound to push people apart. Isolation and loneliness come because of sin. It's a great tool of the enemy. It's a consequence of not having a relationship with God, and it is designed to isolate you so that you can be easily overthrown. God, on the other hand, brings you to Himself so you have a relationship with Him, places you in a body of saints that is there for your support and seeks to remove you from the equation - you die to yourself, you live for Him. You are used to serve others, and you find life. But it's that big battle, again, that Solomon will write about, and he'll give us some reasons how the world works in dividing us and what God does to bring us together.

Back in 1969, Three Dog Night did a song called "One" (is the loneliest number). Anybody remember that song? Oh good. (Laughing) Because I looked it up - I have no idea. (Laughing) That's way back there! But the song begins with the words, "One is the loneliest number that you'll ever do. And two" - we should all sing it together - "can be as bad as one. It's the loneliest number since the number one." (Laughing) Well, that's the subject, this morning, of Solomon's word to us. What makes us companions and friends and blessed by God, and what forces us into loneliness and isolation and separation? You might want to think about how sin works even in your own life in pushing you away from your family, ruining relationships, and also pushing you away from church - the church family - and the benefit that God has for you here and how the enemy would like to keep you from those benefits.

I had someone say a while back, "You know, the church is getting too big. I might have to go somewhere else." And I thought, "That is the lamest excuse I've ever heard for leaving the church." Blame me, you're better off. But, to blame the size of the church - that's just foolishness. How many people can you really know anyway? I think bigness helps you. You can pass along on people you don't like and find some you will. You have more choices. (Laughing) The issue is not the size of the church. The size of the church is not an external measurement. It's an

internal dimension of your heart. How willing are you to walk with God and enter into all that God provides - because the world is very busy in its ways and because of sin tearing you away from others and making you live alone?

Verse 1 says this, "Then I returned and considered" (he's back to his analysis work) "all the oppression that is done" (and there's that key term) "under the sun." This is the horizontal plane of life apart from God. And here's his observation - first one - "And look! The tears of the oppressed, but they have no comforter - on the side of their oppressors there is power, but they have no comforter." Now, Solomon is going to give us three conditions of social behavior, if you will, or life in the world "under the sun," that push us to be alone. And he starts off with this one - oppression. Whether it is business or it is politics, whether you're out in the school yard or you're in the courtroom, the oppressed are everywhere. It's a consequence of man living for himself. And in every culture, there is usually very little help afforded to the oppressed. We can cry out injustice - it's everywhere. We see it. It's hard to hide from it. You can't deny that it exists. And we also can't ignore the fact that the oppressors can powerfully lash about with really no one to restrain them. It happens in every culture, at every time and in every place. It happens on a small scale - in families - with dominating people. It happens in larger scale - in city governments and in nations. It's a world problem. Life, in that regard, is not fair. And you see it, you know it, and Solomon saw it too. And the world is characterized by a phrase - "might is right." It's the way things work. It's the way people do business, if you will. That's not God's will. It's not the way it works in the body of Christ. It's not the way it works amongst the people of God - it shouldn't. But it is certainly the way life is in the world, and Solomon sees it as an observable fact of life. "So I went back to consider the oppression in the world, under the sun, and look, behold, the weeping of the oppressed. No comfort for them. No solution. And look at the oppressors. They don't have any comfort either." It is a consequence of the sinfulness of man.

When you start the Old Testament, and you begin to read through, it doesn't take you long to get to the Law because God had chosen a people - not because they were better but because He chose them. It's His call. And He gave to them a judicial system that had a couple of absolute purposes. The first and foremost one was that the Law was designed to bring the people to honor God, to get Him involved, to realize that He sits at the top, if you will, that He's the Lord of the nation. Second of all, it was designed to curb the sinfulness of man - upon which these laws were to have an impact. Because we need God's help, we need to be

stopped in the way that we go about, so often, living our lives. The Law was given to us to bring fear to the would-be lawbreaker. There were consequences, some of them extremely severe. But in the Law, God always designed to protect the poor, the defenseless, the widow, the fatherless. Read Deuteronomy 17 or 19 - you can read a lot of others, but those specifically speak to those issues. And God designed His Law for His people, even to protect us from ourselves, from our sinfulness so that we would rather, then, turn to the Lord. And what you find in the New Testament is once you get saved and God moves in by His Spirit and you get a new heart, then you don't need a law because love dictates now. You die to you. You live to serve Him. And there's no law. Love doesn't, and isn't, restrained by law - it just loves. It gives - as the Lord gave for us.

By the time you get to the prophets in the Old Testament, you will hear the Lord speaking to many generations about the injustices of man and God speaking to them clearly about ignoring His ways. Asaph wrote in Psalm 82:1-4, "God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods. How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked." God desires that be the case - that fellowship and support and help and that unity amongst His people would exist. It's His blessing. But in the world, apart from God, you don't find that. You find oppression because that's what sin brings to the table. Notice that Solomon saw the injustice when the powerful win, and the oppressed, they lose every time. It is a "survival of the fittest" jungle, isn't it? Amos will write in chapters 1 and 2 about the heart of God towards the oppressed, but you won't find that in the world. The sorrow of the oppressed is made worse by the fact - we read here - that there's no way out, no one to help them. Who is the hero of the oppressed in our world? Who is the champion for them? There is none. Not in the long term, unless God enters the picture. He, of course, is the Savior. But life is filled with frustration and unresolved inequity "under the sun." And notice verse 1 - it's without considering God. Solomon, in his misery, is so affected by what he sees that verses 2 and 3 are pretty powerful statements that you won't hear from people very often. He says, "With all the suffering that I see, if you're dead, you're better off. And there's someone that's even better off than being dead - it's someone that was never born to see it."

Now, those are horrible conclusions, but they show the emptiness of trying to find any kind of meaningful relationship life in the world apart from God. Oppression

brings loneliness. In fact, loneliness is a by-product of the oppression that's in the world. It drives men apart. It pushes people away from one another. You can't survive alone. You were not created to be an island. You're not made to be a survivalist. It's not God's intention for you. Never, in any place in the Scriptures, is there to be that go-it-alone. And we realize that, I think, in the world. We can see it. If you're depressed and someone calls you, man, it can change your day. "Oh, I feel so much better!" A ten minute visit to someone in a convalescent home will do far more than 24-hour nursing care. You can buy nursing care. You can't buy love. So, God made us with an intention to be able to be involved with others, but the world, in its plan to destroy in the enemy's hands, seeks to make you lonely and to isolate you.

Now, lonely is a condition. It's not loneliness in the sense that we need alone time. Everybody likes that. If you have a lot of kids at home, you like "me" time, right? "I need some me time!" Moms will tell you that. "Just hold the baby. I gotta have me time for a few minutes." That's different. It's not lonesomeness - where you are separated from someone for a while, but they're coming back. It's temporary. Loneliness has to do with isolation, with being pushed away from everyone else. And it's a by-product, and it's a sad deal. You can be lonely in a large crowd. You can be lonely in a big family. You can be alone. I think Warren Wiersbe wrote of loneliness, "It's a malnutrition of the soul brought about by living on substitutes rather than relationships."

Solomon noticed that there is a tyranny in the world where there are certain elite classes of people - whether they're kings or judges or bosses - who control others for their own benefit, who misuse their power, who live by the golden rule - "I have the gold, I rule." And, on the side of the oppressed, the frustration is there's no one to help them, no one to comfort them. On the side of the oppressor, the fellow who throws his weight around and has his way, he also is isolated because no one hangs out with him. He's not friends with anybody. No one appreciates him, looks up to him. He's an oppressor. He finds himself alone as well. That's what sin does. "They have no comforter." It's said twice. It's an important insight because oppression doesn't produce peace, it doesn't bring people together. It divides them. And that's how sin works - whether it's the North versus the South during the Civil War or a divorce or a person who loses their job or forsakes them because of anger. Oppression divides people into classes and then leaves them all helpless or hopeless, if you will. "Who's going to speak for me? Who's going to help me?" And sometimes the oppressed, they just want to become oppressors. "Well

if I ever get in charge, here's what I'm gonna do." In fact the worse tyrants in the world, historically, are people who came from very oppressed upbringings, and they break out and they get power, and they're the worst of all. Life owes them now. They're getting even, if you will. The control freak. Right? So, oppression divides. It doesn't help. And it leaves no hope.

Second of all, verse 4, competition is an issue. Not only does oppression divide us, but competition does. Notice that he says, "Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind." Or it's empty, vanity. Now Solomon, I think, looked to honest workers and hard workers and thought, "Well, I'll find a more desirable effect in the world by people who are honest and hard-working." And his view of this was that this didn't work very well either because ultimately this hard worker was only interested in being sure his neighbor saw how well he was doing - producing an envy or a jealousy in his neighbor. That didn't help either. That didn't bring anybody together. That still drives them apart. Keeping up with the Joneses is a 3000-year-old problem. Solomon saw it in his days. And look at the industrial guy - he's skillful, he works hard, he is into it physically, but his heart is far-removed. And Solomon was very disappointed here, as well, because he found that the motivation behind the work was this desire to compete and then to beat his neighbor to gain. Even to create in them a jealousy or an envy that said, "Well, I want to keep up with him" or "I want to stay ahead of him." So, he's not going to work and working hard to make things better. He, because of sin in the world, does what everyone else does - he wants to be seen as better-suited, better-situated, making a better place for himself. And competition, individually, a battle of self, is what divides us. It doesn't bring people together. God didn't make you selfish. Sin did. The consequence of sin - it's life in the world, man, that's how you are. Not because God made you that way. God will save you from that. But in the world, that's how people live. You watch, and you see how much people flaunt what they have or want what others have and wish they didn't have it. Even to the point of saying, "I don't know why they have it. I'm better than they are! How can God do that?" Solomon is talking about individual competition.

By the way, he's not talking about corporate competition, which is biblically, I think, even healthy. Free market economy is, I think, a fairly biblical idea because it produces better products, and it drives down prices. It stimulates growth. That's all fine on a national level, on a corporate level. But individually, sin runs (and not that national corporations aren't run by sin) but the application is personal

- the guy that works hard just looks to keep his neighbor at bay, if you will. "I'm gonna out-earn, out-buy, outclass my neighbor." The workaholic, who wants to gain a sense of self worth by saying, "I am what I do, or I am what I have." And that just doesn't happen in the world around us. It happens in your family, it happens at school, it can happen in churches. But it never brings people together. It's oppression. It drives them apart. It's competition that drives them apart.

And then, the opposite side of the coin in verse 5, Solomon says, and then there's this idle guy, "The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh." From one extreme to the other, Solomon turns to consider the man who does nothing. "Well, I don't want to get into that commercialism of life. I'm not into that, dude. I'm a dropout. I'm a sixties drop off the planet. We sit in the woods, the toilet's outside. We let our beards grow. We're just out of it, man." And Solomon goes, "Well, I looked at that too, but that doesn't really work either. Right? That doesn't sustain itself. In fact, you'll destroy yourself that way." "You don't work," Paul said, "you don't eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). You can't really drop out either. That's not the solution. But it does isolate you again, doesn't it? It moves you away from other people. Solomon was not a big friend of idle peoples' lives. In fact, if you read Proverbs, he constantly is going after them. "Laziness is like a deep sleep," he writes. "A person will suffer hunger because of his laziness" (Proverbs 19:15). Or, "The slothful in his work is the brother to him who is a great destroyer" (Proverbs 18:9). "A little folding of the hands, a little slumber, a little nodding of the head will bring poverty to you like a prowler and need to you like an armed man" (Proverbs 6:10-11). Solomon wasn't a big fan of that, but he looked at the guy who despises the competition of commercialism, and he says, "You're not any better off as far as bringing people together. You've checked out, but in so doing, you've isolated yourself as well." There's no blessing to be found there, either. Laziness is a path to destruction.

And then he says in verse 6, but there is a balanced guy who has "a handful with quietness rather than both hands full, together with toil and" - that poetic term he uses a lot - "grasping for the wind." This impossibility, right, where you can hold something in your hand. So there is a balanced guy. He has some but not all. He doesn't run the rat race, but he doesn't run from responsibility either. So, no sense having both hands full and nothing to show for it. Better you have some peace and not have everything. But rivalry, envy, competition, oppression - they don't bless us, they push us away from one another. "Better is a little with the fear of the LORD," Solomon will write in Proverbs 15:16, "than great treasures with

trouble." So, the industrious man thinks money will bring peace, but he has no time to enjoy it, and he's left separated from his neighbor who he's now gloating over. And the idle man thinks nothing will bring peace, and he's right. Nothing will. It's a life that can't be supported. And then there's this fellow who has found labor with contentment of great gain. So Solomon, in relationship issues, says, "Look, oppression will divide. Competition will divide."

Third, verses 7 and 8, compulsion divides. Now listen to what he says, "Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun:" - the emptiness of it, and he describes one more fellow. "There is one alone, without companion: he has neither son nor brother, yet there is no end to all his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches. But he never asks, 'For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?' This also is vanity and a grave misfortune." Now, one more example - compulsion. Here's a guy that is doing what he's doing, and he's not really sure why. Nor does it stop him. He never stops to go, "What am I working so hard for? No, I just gotta do it!" "Why? Why?" "I don't know." Gazing. "I don't know....." But I want you to notice the progression, because one of the things that Hebrew poetry does is it increases or decreases value or emphasis by increasing or decreasing number. So you start with oppression - a lot of people are oppressed by others. And then you get into envy, which is really one-on-one - that's two people. And now we're down to one guy by himself. Three, two, one. Right? We're down to one. This is the fellow that is interested only in his own gain, and he can't even tell you what's driving him. Some people say, "Well, I'm doing it for my family." He can't tell you that. "I'm doing it for my children." Good luck. You don't have any! Why are you doing that? "I don't know! But I have this compulsion to go forward." And it's interesting that that also isolates. The higher you climb the ladder, the lonelier your life becomes. The tendency of very wealthy people, very powerful people is they have more casual contacts, they have less friends, they're less friendly, they trust less people, there's far less accountability, and they're isolated in the position they find themselves. And Solomon's just looking at the world like this. He understands what he sees. It applies to the fellow who doesn't want to get married. Why? "It's too expensive." Have kids. "I can't afford kids!" And his relationships - where? They aren't with people. They're with things. "Look at my car collection. Look at my art work. Look at the cause that I'm spending all of my time raising money for." Or their pets. They talk to their pets like they're humans. Pets are easier. People require a response.



So, here's a solitary man with no reason to labor so hard, no family to care for, no relatives to save for. He's just driven by self-gain and never has an eye to say, "Wait a minute. I should slow down a little bit." And even though you might do that as well and you say, "Well, I'm doing it for my family," look, Solomon is willing to say, "Even guys without families do this. That's not an excuse. It's not an excuse." And until he's too old to care, or maybe he never wises up to smell the coffee and see that there's real life that God has available, and it's not about that compulsive desire to acquire. Oppression pushes people apart. Competition pushes people apart. But so does compulsion. Loneliness is promoted by these tendencies in the world, because of sin, to go that direction.

Which is why, when he gets to this point, Solomon says, "Well, maybe we should talk about friendships or fellowship," and he turns to that beginning in verse 9. The better part of God's will is that we would have relationships, not be isolated from one another. And he begins by saying, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor." There is a tremendous gain for you, as a Christian, to be in church and fellowship. Doesn't have to be here - a lot of good places to go. But you've gotta be somewhere. You've gotta be known. The people that bounce from church to church, I think, are just headed for disaster. Nobody knows them. Nobody knows them well enough to care about them. If there's trouble, they really don't know who to call because they're kind of superficial in all that they do. Yet the world understands that. There are a lot of social organizations that are designed to bring people together. Under the auspices of we like to vacation in the same place, we like to play the same card games, we like to drink the same whiskey, doesn't matter - any social group that is driven to gather together for the sake of avoiding loneliness. But until you know the Lord, you really don't see the full benefit of fellowship because you're still all about you. You go for you. You go to get for you. It's all about what you can get out of it. And yet, once you come to the Lord, there is a premise of companionship that convinces you of God's heart within - that you don't have to live for you. You can actually find real life by giving your life away, serving others. You can't sell that to the world, but you can find that in the church. Right? Then two are better than one, they have a greater reward for their labor.

Now, this premise here in verse 9 is a biblical one - two are better than one. If you go back and start reading the Bible - Genesis 1 and then chapter 2 - God creates Adam. He looks at Adam and goes, "That's no good." Right? It's not good. Now, Adam hadn't sinned. Adam hadn't rebelled against God. Adam hadn't been

fighting with God. Adam had just been created by God, and God goes, "I don't like this." Six times, in all of His creative process over six days, the Lord made stuff and went like this, "That is beautiful!" And you can read, the Lord saw and all that He had made, and He said, "That's good. That's good. That's good. Ohhh, Adam. Not good." And then He said this, "It is not good for man to be alone." So He makes Eve, brings her to Adam and says, "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder." And then He does this, "That's very good." Eve and Adam together. God's first negative comment about creation came with Adam's creation. He solved the issue by bringing Adam a helpmate suitable for him. We are made in His image. God made us for fellowship. He didn't design you to be alone. The world, though, will want to isolate you, but fellowship is a basic human need woven into the fabric of your DNA. But the world, the sin, to destroy makes you independent rather than dependent. Have you been to the gym lately? You can't find anyone to talk to at a gym. Everyone has headsets on. And they're all like zoned out (Laughing) - whatever they're doing. "Hey, how you doing?" They don't talk to me. (Laughing) Unless you're on somebody's machine, they're not going to say a word to you. It's not a place of fellowship. It's a perfect picture of the world. You ever get on an elevator and try to talk to somebody? Doesn't work. There's a written rule, isn't there? I'm pretty sure there is. There's some kind of a tacit rule of all lining up and facing the same way at the door. (Laughing) Turn around and go, "Hey, how are you guys doing?" Oh, no, we don't like that. It doesn't work for us. Uncomfortable. Awkward. Many folks do that - they create safe havens of loneliness to protect themselves from being hurt or being hurt again or being failed by those they love or the disappointment of people or their weaknesses. But that's not a solution. It's a problem.

The solution is - two are better than one. God wants to bring fellowship into your life, but you don't see that until you come to know Him. And Solomon lists some benefits here. Notice, he says in verse 9, "they have a good reward for their labor." Now, the original idea was one of increased revenue. If you cooperate with others, your profit margin may be lower, but because you're able to have twice the manpower and wisdom and skill, the greater overall is that there'll be a gain for you. That works, that's true. Make good partners. There's support when we work with others. Team projects are far easier than people working on their own. Jesus didn't send the twelve apostles out by themselves. He goes, "Just go two by two." And He got seventy guys later, He goes, "Go out two by two." There's something to be said for fellowship when it comes to ministry. There is a mutual benefit, right? Two can live cheaper than one. In the depression, there was a drive towards

people getting married simply because of the financial benefit of living together. In fact, one of the songs of the depression era had the words, "Potatoes are cheap, tomatoes are cheaper. Now is the time to fall in love." Which kind of addressed that whole issue. People like being together. That's a worldly concept, but yet, at the same time, there is great benefit, in God's eyes, from fellowship. But you can't find it in the world. Everything in the world pushes you apart. It's until you come to the Lord that you are brought together.

There is mutual assurance. Notice verse 10, "For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up." That's so often, unfortunately, the problem. People go, "Hey, I don't have to go to church to be a Christian." And I always say, "Well, you have to go to church to stay one. You need the help, man. You can't make it alone, Mr. Lone Ranger. It doesn't work, you know?" It doesn't work. And it won't work for you. We need reassurance. If you do a face plant, you want someone there to catch you. You don't want that, "I've fallen, and I can't get up" experience, right? You want to push, "Help!!! Somebody come get me!" It's good to have friends, isn't it? And you'll find out who your true friends are when you're in trouble. Right? When your business fails, or you make a foolish mistake and you fall flat, you'll discover who your true friend is. And I think you can always - I'll tell you what the definition of a true friend is and how to define them - when you make a real fool of yourself, they won't tell you you've done a permanent job. They'll bail you out. They'll stand with you. "You're gonna be all right. Things are gonna be fine." Right? You get picked up. Everybody has casual friends, but are they there when you need them? They're not, because that's not the way life pushes you. That's the way the church, the body, that's the way the Lord would push you. You can't have a hundred good friends, but you can have enough to make your life meaningful and purposeful and strong. Everybody needs a balcony, you know? A cheering section. "Way to go, dude!" It's nice to get calls from people, "I'm just praying for you!" Ohhh, okay. Pretty cool. A voice of encouragement. It's another good reason to get married, by the way. You're living with a voice of encouragement...or you should be. (Laughing) If not, don't marry that person. (Laughing) Just saying.

Verse 11, mutual refreshment. "Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone?" Now that's pretty simple language, isn't it? Body heat is reciprocal. When you lay down with someone to get warm, they get warm, so do you. There's really no way to have body heat in one direction. Right? If you watch that Survivor show on TV (it's one of my favorite shows.....), but all

these people go to an island, they live there by themselves. What do they do? They immediately begin to lay really close at night. "Oh, how are you doing?" "I'm good." Freezing. Perfect. Perfect example. Body heat is reciprocal, isn't it? You couples - do you snuggle with each other when you're angry with one another? Heck no! You're on the other side of the bed because it is hard to snuggle with a bobcat. (Laughing) But it's practical, isn't it? I know when my wife goes away to women's retreats, I'm always grasping for the wind. It's a good argument. You know, Paul said to the Ephesians in chapter 4:26, "Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath," and I think that, more than anything else, it applies to the fact I can stay warm at night then, you know? "Come here, honey." "Okay, yeah we've solved our problems." I guess every day's a clean slate. But here, this is what God intends. When He said, "That's not good that man should live alone," and He made him a perfect helper.

Verse 12, mutual reinforcements. "Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken." People travel in pairs, they travel in groups. Alone in anything, you're a sitting duck. But it's especially true in life - apart from God. So you need the help, we need the help. It'll keep you on the road, it'll keep you standing. You do have any enemy, you know - Satan would like to destroy you, and he's relentless. In fact, Peter said, he roars like a lion, he stalks his prey, he just kind of wanders about like an adversary - seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). And you know that lions only roar when they think they've got their prey where they want them - they're not going to get away. So we need reinforcements. We need people to pray with us and to talk to us and to help us stay on track and to overcome the enemy. The solution to loneliness is very simple. You need friends. But friends can't be found in the world apart from God's work. You'll end up just serving yourself in the friendships that you have. I love the math here. Remember we said it went from three to two to one? Well here, it goes from one to two to three. Right? Now we're up to threefold cord that cannot be easily broken. So, we need God's help. Now this verse is often applied to marriage, and certainly it should be, but it can certainly be applied beyond that. Marriage is two become one, but then God wraps Himself around them, and now you have a cord - three strings together, interwoven - and now you have strength that is far greater than the two individuals. But it's typical Hebrew literature - one, two three; three, two, one. Now the world doesn't think that. You live in the world, you're going to be isolated, and you're going to be picked off. But you need a support network, and you need to have the visible representation of Jesus in your life. You need people that will pick you up.

I heard a story a while back of a little boy who was deathly afraid of the dark, and his mom - one night - dropped something in the kitchen, and she said, "Honey, can you go out on the patio and get the broom?" And he went, "Oh no. It's dark." His mother could see the terror in his eyes, and she said, "Look, honey. Jesus is everywhere. He'll be with you. You don't have to be afraid." He thought about that for a minute, and he went to the door and he stuck his head out, and he said real quietly, "Hey, Jesus," (Laughing) "could you hand me the broom?" (Laughing) Because theology is one thing, but reality of the theology is another. We don't need to just know the truth, we want to be able to experience it. And as others represent Him to us, then we get hooked up. Right?

Well, Solomon's last example here - before we quit - is in the last few verses, and he wants to just, again, talk about the human relationships that are so fleeting and failing versus the true benefit of fellowship which only God can provide in His people. And he tells a little story. He said (verse 13), "Better a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more. For he comes out of prison to be king, although he was born poor in his kingdom. I saw all the living who walk under the sun;" (again, in the world) "they were with the second youth who stands in his place. There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king; yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind." Now, this is Solomon's fourth time he uses the word "better." He used it in verse 3, verse 6, verse 9, and here as well. But his illustration is pretty clear, and he said, "You know, there's a time when people are no longer attractive to us - like the old king. No matter how good he may have been, now he's older. And being older, he wants his own way. He's not willing to change. You can't admonish him. And so people drop that guy like a lead balloon. But they immediately turn to the new hero on the block. This happens to be a poor kid who grew up hard, and he's humble. He's come out of prison, so to speak, humbly. It's left him as a humble man, and as he comes to be king, everyone votes for him." "He's our guy. He's our man. He's the one!" And they cheer for him, and all of the realm follows him with a popular heart of love. But, his last verse says the next generation could care less about him. So even that kind of temporary applause doesn't substitute for what you really need - fellowship with God and with one another.

I think it was Cromwell who took the throne of Charles I in England who, on his coronation day, said to his young son standing by him, "Don't trust the cheering

crowd, young man. They would cheer just as loud if this was our hanging day." Cynical, but true in the sense that it doesn't really last. Right?

The selfish oppression drives men from one another. Individual competition doesn't bring you together - it drives you away. And the compulsiveness of sin in the heart that is never satisfied and can never get enough and, "I've gotta have that next million. When I get that next million, that's gonna be it!!" That's never it. There's injustice in life. We see it. People need to be encouraged. Fellowship is the answer. You can find that with God. You won't find that in the world. You find that in the church. You find that amongst the people of God.

He's a pretty smart guy, this Solomon. Convicting, too. You might have to start reading faster.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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