

THE ATTITUDES WE SHOULD EMBRACE

FEBRUARY 5, 2006 – ECCLESIASTES 4:1-16

MEMORY VERSE:

Ecclesiastes 4:12, *“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”*

INTRODUCTION

In the first part of chapter four, Solomon continues his discussion on the oppression and injustices of this life. He then turns his focus to the fleeting nature of pursuing ambition and success and the impact this has on the relationships in your life. Solomon perceives there is a problem when people choose to pursue riches and success over relationships. God is relational and He has created us with a desire and need for relationships. When we try to replace our need for companionship and intimacy with a pursuit of status, power and possessions, our lives will become empty, meaningless and lonely. We are not here on earth to serve ourselves, but rather to serve God and others. Let the truth of the Great Commandment, “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself,” be imprinted on your heart continually.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. The injustice and wickedness noted in verses 1-3 are realities with which we can all identify (especially in light of September 11, 2001). They are a tragic part of life in this broken world. What observations does Solomon make in these three verses about human wickedness? How do you struggle with the tension of knowing God is in control and yet seeing wickedness abound in this world?
2. What are the different contrasts in attitude towards work that Solomon identifies in verses 4-5? What are the consequences of both?
3. In verses 7-8, what irony does Solomon observe concerning those who strive after wealth and success as the focus of their lives?

4. What is the answer to this dilemma that Solomon offers in verse 6? How can this lead to contentment?

5. God highly values relationships and He has created us to have the same desire. In verses 9-12, what are some of the reasons Solomon implores us to keep relationships as a high priority in our lives?

6. In verses 13-16, Solomon describes the fleeting nature of ambition, success and popularity. What realities does he identify about pursuing advancement and recognition in this story of kings and their successors? Do you think Solomon is speaking from first hand experience in these verses?

OUR WALK WITH GOD

1. Two key issues are addressed in this chapter:
 - a. The futility of climbing the ladder of success and the emptiness at the top.
 - b. The importance of nurturing relationships and community.

In evaluating your life, how are you doing in these two areas?
What changes in attitude or focus do you need to make today?

2. In verses 9-12, Solomon emphasizes the importance of relationships and community. Why is this perspective on relationships so important in the Christian community? How is this true biblical community reflected in your small group? What change of attitude or commitment do you personally need to make in regards to your small group that will help accomplish the true biblical community that Christ desires for His church?

GOING DEEPER

Read Isaiah 1:23, 10:1-3; Amos 2:6-8, 5:7-12, Micah 2:1-4 and Malachi 3:5. What do we learn from these passages regarding injustice and oppression? From your perspective, what are the most serious injustices happening in our country today? How do you find balance as a Christian between trying, or not trying to correct something that you know will never be eliminated?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS FOR THE WEEK

From his book, "The Whine of the Top Dog," Chuck Swindoll says, "Our culture is flooded with courses, books and seminars on how to get ahead and be financially independent and secure. There is a widespread belief among people (Christians included) that once we get to the top of our profession we'll find relaxation and contentment." Solomon's conclusion is that you will only find emptiness, frustration and meaninglessness in regards to this pursuit. Are you willing to listen to these words of wisdom and experience, or continue climbing the fool's ladder of success?

"We can make more friends in two months of showing interest in others than in two years of trying to get them interested in us."

Dale Carnegie

"Life is, as Eugene Peterson once put it, "a long, slow obedience in the same direction." It's a marathon, an epic journey. They who walk together, walk farther. The path can get steep and rough, and walking with another brings help should we stumble and fall. I pity the person who has no friends to lean on when life gets hard. Not only does he face the difficulties of life, but he faces the discouragement and loneliness of confronting those challenges alone."

David Jeremiah, "Searching for Heaven on Earth"