

ECCLESIASTES SERIES SIX
LIFE IS TOUGH: HUDDLE UP!
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ECCLESIASTES 4:1-12
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Ecclesiastes is Solomon's cumulative record of his search for life's meaning and significance. The book of Ecclesiastes is the personal diary of a king who had everything—except fulfillment and satisfaction.

While his is a rather depressing search, the lessons he learns and the insights he shares are priceless. We began studying the book in January. We will now reengage in mining its treasures during the next several Sundays.

☉ SLIDE: Remember:

In Chapter One Solomon protested the meaninglessness of life.

READ Ecclesiastes 1: 1-2.

The things of life were just fleeting vapors—morning mists—if you will.

In Chapter Two he explored the pursuit of pleasure—wining and womanizing to his heart's discontent. He then poured his energies into massive building projects only to discover that he was still not fulfilled .

READ Ecclesiastes 2:10-11.

In Chapter Three he concluded that life was hopelessly unfair as it moved toward death.

READ Ecclesiastes 3:16, 18-20.

Nevertheless, he did conclude to enjoy life as long as we had it.

READ Ecclesiastes 3:12-14.

☉ SLIDE: Solomon's Thesis in Ecclesiastes 4:1-12 might well be stated: "Life is tough. A support system is indispensable."

More succinctly we might say: "Life is tough. Huddle up!"

☉ SLIDE: THE WORLD IS A MISERABLE PLACE FOR MANY PEOPLE (ECCLESIASTES 4:1-3).

☉ SLIDE: Ecclesiastes 4:1: Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed — and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors — and they have no comforter.

The world is a place of tears and misery, in which many are ground down and "have no comforter" (also repeated for emphasis).

Hard to eek out a living. Most of the day was spent in seeking food to survive.

Work contracts of the middle ages: 6am to 8pm: 14 hours on and 10 off every day but Sunday.

"Oppression:" take advantage of the less powerful: financially, personal rights; usury: 2%.

Credit cards charging 18% to 30% interest: I am a dead beat.

Late on mortgage payment and they legally raise your interest rate.

College Loans: \$100,000: Working several jobs and still getting farther and farther behind.

The parking Lot of life is miserable. Struggling to find a job—so many outsourced—self image is hurt, life is embarrassing, back home living is humiliating.

☉ SLIDE: Solomon understood the emotions of the person who has just heard the terrifying phrase, "Reorganization has made it necessary for us to terminate your position."

Think about what happens when we're fired or forced to step down from a position.

First, we experience a tremendous sense of isolation. Co-workers aren't coworkers any more. The office we've gone to for years—we aren't welcome there any more.

Second, we feel left out. Everything we've worked for is suddenly gone. We're no longer a part of the team. Our responsibilities are assigned to someone else.

Third, our self-image is dealt a tremendous blow. We have become insignificant. What we've done hasn't been important enough for them to keep us around. We don't count.

Finally, we are wounded emotionally. Our hearts ache. The people we've trusted—the ones who signed our paychecks—have betrayed us, and it hurts.

It is miserable and lonely at the bottom. It is also lonely and miserable at the top.

At first glance, we think of Solomon as one of the oppressors, the big men unmercifully yanking the strings of people's lives.

But you know he also experienced his share of difficulty. As king he faced the day-to-day criticism, disappointment and heartache. People have double-crossed him; betrayed him; sold out to his enemies; and even challenged his job security.

David—his dad: Isolated, Rejected by Saul; Michael, Joab kills Abner; Children,

The view at the top of the heap only shows him that the scenery isn't much to look at.

☉ SLIDE: Ecclesiastes 4:2: And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive.

☉ SLIDE: Ecclesiastes 4:3: But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.

The dead have attained rest at last.

More fortunate than both the living and the dead, however, are those who have never been born to see the pain and misery.

☉ SLIDE: WE LIVE IN A DOG EAT DOG WORLD (ECCLESIASTES 4:4).

Cutthroat competition is simply the way of the world. In a desperate attempt to climb the ladder of success many men and women will happily kick and trample on the heads of those beneath them.

☉ SLIDE: Ecclesiastes 4:4: And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Company leadership changed. MY DAD part to the old regime. Systematically removed all officers of the company and replaced with others.

Mike wanting Dad's job. Dad trained him to take over his job so the company could move him out of leadership.

I was 16 years old. Remember as Dad introduced him to me—I knew immediately what was going on.

He wanted my dad's job—and I hated him for it.

☉ SLIDE: SOLOMON RECOMMENDED A HAPPY BALANCE (ECCLESIASTES 4:5-6).

Some people fall into the trap of striving for success at any price.

Some people just give up and depend on the system to take care of them as they live off the labors of others.

Both perspectives are horribly out of balance.

☉ SLIDE: Ecclesiastes 4:5: The fool folds his hands and ruins himself.

“Ruins himself,” literally means the "eating of the flesh [basar]"

Rather than embrace work and its rewards the foolish person has nothing to eat but himself!

☉ SLIDE: Ecclesiastes 4:6: Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.

A single handful with peace beats fighting for two handfuls any day.

Proverb 15:17: “Better is a dish of vegetables where love is, than a fattened ox and hatred with it.”

Swindoll: Looked into face of frustrated 47 year old man.

His past life was strewn with the consequences of fast-paced competition.

His son would no longer speak to him.

His daughter said to him rather bluntly, “I don't like being around you any more, dad.”

His wife was afraid of him.

He was at the top of his profession—six figure salary, numerous perks, influential position, country club membership, luxurious company car—the whole package.

Then, for some reason, probably because he was totally out of control, he stole \$15,000 from the company. The company agreed not to press charges if he repaid the money.

He was immediately dismissed from the organization.

He lost his job, his reputation, the one thing that gave him his identity, and the only thing he was trained to do.

“...and don't forget, family was happier when he was not around.”

He sobbed, “How do I build back a home? How do I relate to a son and daughter who not only did not respect him but who refused to talk to him? How do I go back and do it over?”

He reached up and grabbed the header on the door frame and wept uncontrollably.

Swindoll: “I thought to myself, there is a product of the system.

The man confessed: “I bought into it all the way down to the soles of my shoes.”

Put this verse on the mirror before we go to work in the morning—every high school and college diploma.

☉ SLIDES: Cigarette boxes in Turkey.

☉ SLIDE: Ecclesiastes 4:6: Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.

Now, Solomon paints a verbal portrait of the tragic workaholic.

☉ SLIDE: THE WORKAHOLIC IS A TRAGEDY TO HIS MISERABLE SELF AND TO OTHERS
(ECCLESIASTES 4:7-8).

Notice the progression. This passage begins with many people oppressed and many doing the oppressing.

In the second scene there are two people—one against the other in competitive rivalry.

In this third scene there is only one—“a man all alone.”

☉ SLIDE: As Workaholics climb the ladder of success they discover it is not a ladder at all.

They are climbing a pyramid. They get increasingly lonely...they have fewer friends...family...relationships... and less accountability

There isn't room at the top for several. There's only room for one.

☉ SLIDE: Ecclesiastes 4:7: Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: 8 There was a man all alone(“Having No Second Person”); he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth.

☉ SLIDE: Ecclesiastes 4:8: "For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" This too is meaningless — a miserable business!

Hamsters: ball and Ricky and dashaunds

The reasons for workaholic behavior vary:

☉ SLIDE: 1. Escaping from pain

Lose a loved one—bury their lives in work.

☉ SLIDE: 2. Shoring up a poor self image

☉ SLIDE: 3. Searching for approval

Salesman bigger checks ever month: Every month I got my paycheck I called my dad to tell him how much I made. Never once did dad say, well done.”

“Well, I approve!”

☉ SLIDE: 4. Struggling with knowing how to love

We were dealing with a pastor and his wife in crisis. Pastor was a workaholic, leaving wife and children alone for long periods of time.

“Why are you away from your family for such long periods of time?”

“I suppose that I feel more adequate at work than I do at home. At home I have a wife who needs a best friend and I don't know how to do that. I have three children who need a father—and I don't know what one of those does.

☉ SLIDE: 5. Yielding to fear

Pastor working 15 hours per day. Wife angry at him. Bigger church, cars, toys.

“Why do you work so much.”-“I have to maintain our lifestyle.”

“No you don’t.”-“But we wouldn’t have all our things.” (tracing fears).

“What if you didn’t have all your stuff.”-“It wouldn’t be good.

“Why wouldn’t it be good?”-“We couldn’t live here-drive the cars we drive. And she wouldn’t be happy. She might leave.” She was shocked. Underneath all his overworking was the fear she would leave him.

“Mamm, can you reassure him you wouldn’t leave him?”

● SLIDE: 6. Surrendering to pure, unadulterated greed

You may have sensed that he has been building to a climax. He's been talking about the oppressive, competitive, compulsive world of the one who works his or her way to the top of the ladder, becoming the "top dog".

Having arrived, the successful entrepreneur discovers there aren't too many people around. Having climbed the pyramid, the leader usually finds that he has also become a loner.

All this prepares us for more of Solomon's wise counsel from this section of his journal:

● SLIDE: ● LIFE IS TOUGH. HUDDLE UP (ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12).

● SLIDE: Ecclesiastes 4:9: Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:

● SLIDE: Ecclesiastes 4:10: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!

● SLIDE: Ecclesiastes 4:11: Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.

● SLIDE: But how can one keep warm alone?

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

● SLIDE: In community our lives are strong and enduring, like the rope "of three strands". Two friends are great! Three are even greater.

The fool's individualistic life is, by contrast, weak and destined to be "broken".

HUDDLE UP: HOW DO YOU CREATE A SUPPORT SYSTEM.

● SLIDE: 1. BE PROACTIVE IN MAKING FRIENDS

Bronwyn in Germany: 2.5 hours to get to church; 2.5 hours to military base: teach them to comfort.

● SLIDE: 2. RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO TURN TO SELF (RELIANCE, CENTEREDNESS, CONDEMNATION). INSTEAD TURN TO OTHERS.

Julie and I were in Albany NY several months ago leading a conference for pastor’s and wives on how to heal the hurts of ministry. One pastor’s wife was hurting and very alone. Handled her hurt and loneliness by self-reliance. She had recently written a poem about her feelings toward life. Based on Beatitudes.

● SLIDES #: Blessed are the poor in spirit. No, Blessed are the strong, who are always in control and never show weakness.

Blessed are those who mourn, No,
Blessed are those who deny their pain and deaden their hearts—they need no comfort.

Blessed are the meek. No,
Blessed are the survivors who need no one and depend only on themselves.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, No,
Blessed are those who have killed their longings, who no longer have any expectations---nothing will disappoint them.

Blessed are the merciful, No,
Blessed are those who have minimized the damage in their soul so that there is no need for mercy or forgiveness for “nothing bad really happened.”

Blessed are the peacemakers, No,
Blessed are those who keep the peace at any cost (even to the peril of their own soul) so that conflict, self-revelation and the possibility of rejection is avoided at all costs.

● SLIDE #: Our Loneliness needs can only be met in the company of others.

● SLIDE #: The Top Ten Intimacy Needs: Acceptance—Affection—Appreciation—Approval—Attention—Comfort—Encouragement—Respect—Security—Support.

☉ SLIDE: Derrek: Esophagus, 30 pounds, impending surgery.

This week discovered blood disease: Capillaries between arteries and veins struggle to form properly....

Derrek can be rather stoic, another way of saying he can bury things when he wants to.

“How are you?”

“I’m O.K.”

How can he be ok? Just heard this disease is 100% heritable. Have to change surgery plans.

Aneurisms, etc. problems in the future.

Silence held in the air.

“Derrek, when I heard you had this problem, my first thought was, ‘I sure am glad Derrek is in our family. We will be there to support him and stand by him no matter what happens.’ Derrek, you are not in this alone. (Heard audible sigh as he exhaled). We will be standing with you what ever happens. No one should go through these problems alone. We are standing with you.”

Long Pause—“Thank you. I know.”

☉ SLIDE: Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.