

WISDOM ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Intro: From the beginning it is clear that God made man a social creature. That is, He created within us a longing for companionship, for relationships with others. “It is not good for man to be alone.”

And yet in spite of this ancient declaration of the Creator, our world has encouraged us to move into a state of isolated withdrawal. “No longer are we a share and share alike people...”

Solomon long ago observed the same tendencies among his contemporaries. From those observations, he gave some wise advice about relationships. (Eccl. 4)

THE VANITY OF LIFE WITHOUT COMPANIONS

Solomon spoke of four situations that he had observed--four conditions that made life vain. Each in its own way shows the folly of an isolated independence of others.

Man without a **comforter**.

The suggestion of oppression already raises the issue of alienated men. Throughout the OT, God’s prophets spoke of the bitterness of oppression and misused power. That is bad enough; but now Solomon sees further vanity—those who suffer often have no one to comfort them. There is not one relationship that can aid them in overcoming their despair and sadness and thus, there is a feeling that it would be better to be dead than alive.

Man in **competition** with his neighbor.

Solomon sees alienation among men even work itself. A person puts forth energetic effort and he achieves a certain skill at what he does. But what is the motivation behind all this? Often it is simply rivalry, the envy of what another has, the desire to outdo someone else! This is vanity that we should spend the greater part of our lives motivated by competition rather than cooperation for the good of all!

Solomon, however, balances this announcement of vanity with two proverbs that encourage vigorous activity; but not out of a competitive mentality that seeks gain at another’s expense.

v. 5 The fool folds his own flesh

Some may seek to avoid the competition by opting out of work and developing skill. Such people Solomon says are victim of a “self cannibalism”.

v. 6 One fist of rest is better than two fists of labor.

On the other hand, some motivated by the desire to be at the top never find the time to enjoy the fruits of their efforts. Thus, he commends the value of rest from labor.

Man without a **dependent or family**.

Here is a person who spends his life working never thinking about others, only himself. He did not have children or

relatives with which to share his wealth. Consequently he has labor his whole life in vain, having no one with whom to share his blessings. How sad! To attain but to never know the blessing of sharing!

Man without a **counselor**.

In the Scripture there is a presumption that age brings wisdom. However, there is also a temptation in growing older to become isolated and refuse to listen to others, to become unwilling to hear what others have to say even when it may contain wisdom.

Solomon describes an “old and foolish king” who is replaced by a “poor wise lad who came out of prison”, a most unlikely replacement. But why was the king replaced? Because he did not “know how to receive instruction”. His self-perceived wisdom created a barrier that kept him from learning. And Solomon saw people as a result “throng to the side of the second man”.

Yet, even so, Solomon observed that the cycle often repeats itself. The “young lad” who was exalted fell into the same trap of the king he replaced. Solomon could already see that “those who come later will not be happy with him”.

Such is the vanity of a man who isolates himself from good sources of wisdom and instruction.

Each of these stories in its own way indicts a self-centered and self-sufficient isolation from others. And each demonstrates the need for man to develop relationships with others. And to that point Solomon addresses himself as he speaks of:

THE VALUE OF COMPANIONSHIP

In companionship there is accomplishment and encouragement--v. 9-10

In companionship there is mutual benefit--v. 11

In companionship there is protection--v. 12

AN APPLICATION OF THESE PRINCIPLES TO LIFE

Build relationships of mutual caring so that you do not have to go through adversity alone!

Be there for someone else when they hurt or know that you too will suffer alone!

Know that effort motivated by envy will only bring unhappiness.

The problem with competition is that somebody has to win! But in this case the game is never over! “Dog-eat-dog” means many dead dogs. Achieve what you can with the gifts God has given you and enjoy with contentment the portion God gives you. Work motivated by an insatiable desire to “out do” others will only bring misery.

Don't try to go it alone.

Remember God's creation statement, "It is not good for man to be alone".

Loving less to have more is a poor bargain any day of the week. Share your life and wealth with others or you will die a lonely person!

Don't let success give you the big head.

No matter what you achieve, don't forget where you came from.

Don't let success cause you to become isolated. Learn to listen to others and learn from them.

AN APPLICATION OF THESE PRINCIPLES TO THE CONGREGATION

We need to be comforters of our brethren.

We need to cooperate, not compete. We need to work together.

We need to mutually assist and protect each other.

We need to combine our knowledge; learn from one another. We need to share our abilities and resources, not hoard them.

Conclusion: When we apply the principles we enjoy a fellowship that enriches our lives. May we ever know and increase in the relationship of friendship and love Solomon describes.