

LIFE UNDER THE SUN



STUDIES IN ECCLESIASTES

23 September 2018

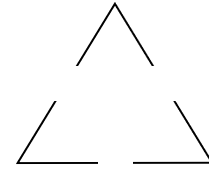
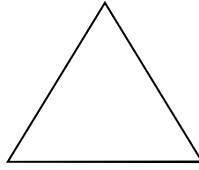
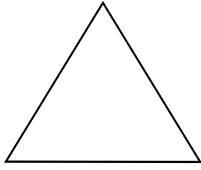
הביל

“If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

— Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Ecclesiastes Part 7 - “The Brokenness & Beauty of Human Relationships”

Introduction: A Genesis 1-3 Theology of Relationship



- Human beings have been designed by God for _____.
- Our _____ has introduced brokenness into our relationship with God and our relationships with one another.

Qohelet’s Consideration of Human Relationships—Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

1. Human beings are prone to _____ and _____ one another. (4:1-3)

Eccl. 4:1— Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.

Understanding Oppression

- * Oppression occurs when one group of people has the desire as well as the _____ and _____ to take advantage of another group. Frequently, this oppression will become systemic.
- * Oppression results in tragic _____ and _____ consequences for the oppressed (Eccl. 4:2-3).

An Observation From History: Those who have experienced oppression will often become _____ themselves.

2. Relationships between people are frequently damaged by _____. (4:4-6)

Envy tends to induce one of two things in people:

*Eccl. 4:4— Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man’s envy of his neighbor. (_____)
This also is vanity and a striving after wind.*

Eccl. 4:5— The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. (_____)

Qohelet observes that both of these are folly because what is really needed is _____.

Eccl. 4:6— Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

3. People are prone to seek _____ in their labors at the expense of their relationships. (4:7-8)

*Eccl. 4:7-8—⁷ Again, I saw vanity under the sun: ⁸ one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?”
This also is vanity and an unhappy business.*

“pleasure”— טוֹב (*toṽb*)—The term used by Qohelet throughout the letter and often translated as joy or enjoyment (2:24; 3:22; 5:18).

Observation: The enjoyment of life is not found exclusively in eating and drinking, but also in _____ with whom we share these good gifts that God has given!

4. Healthy relationships are of great _____ to us. (4:9-12)

Eccl. 4:9— *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.*

- * Recall that he has repeatedly asked what people ‘gain’ for all their toil (1:3, 3:9). Although relationships in and of themselves do not produce lasting meaning, there is ‘reward’ or ‘return’ from them.

Eccl. 4:10-12—¹⁰ *For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!* ¹¹ *Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?* ¹² *And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

Healthy relationships are intended to provide:

1. _____ →

2. _____ →

3. _____ →

Interpreting the ‘threefold cord’ imagery:

Observation: God’s presence in a relationship is intended to _____ people together. This makes the relationship about much more than affinity and adds a transcendent dimension as well as accountability.

5. Sometimes as we age we become increasingly _____ — _____ in our relationships. (4:13-16)

- * In these verses, Qohelet tells the story of an old, foolish king who no longer knew how to receive counsel. Although he had come to power using wisdom, his progressive refusal to listen to others meant that he ultimately caused damage to the people of his kingdom and was not fondly remembered.

Ecclesiastes 4 and Solomon’s (Qohelet’s) Life Story

1. He was an oppressor of his people, working them to the point of frustration and exhaustion (1 Kings 12:4).
2. He gave his life to the pursuit of pleasure and great accomplishments (Eccl. 2:1-11).
3. He also failed to pass on his instructions to his son who perhaps learned more from his example than his words (1 Kings 12:12-15).

The One Who Can Restore Our Broken Relationships

1. Jesus came to _____ those whose relationships with God and others had been broken.

The Story of Jesus & Zacchaeus — Luke 19:1-10

Luke 19:10— “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

2. Jesus’ work on our behalf radically changes the _____ of our lives.

2 Cor. 5:14-15—¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

3. Jesus’ work on the cross _____ us to God and compels us to share this good news with others.

2 Cor. 5:18-21—¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.