

*Chapter summary – Most probably expect people who have not entered into a saving and growing relationship with Jesus Christ to misuse their appointed delegations of power and authority. The truth be known, every gospel believer must be on the alert not to do the same. This misuse or abuse of power and authority is what Solomon addresses next in chapter four. This misuse of power and authority creates a by-product of tremendous oppression for those who are on the receiving end.*

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III. In Solomon’s search for an answer to his question, he reflects upon his observations, (Ch. 3:1-6:12)

**4. SOLOMON ADDRESSES MAN’S MISUSE OF HIS POSSESSIONS AND ABILITIES, (4:1-6:12)**

**1) First he focuses on our handling of power, (4:1-16)**

**(1) The handling of power in the general social arena, (1-3)**

**a. Solomon’s observation, (1)**

 **INTERPRETATION:**

<sup>1</sup> **Then** (then what? Then after pondering man’s various and divinely appointed earthly events, their purpose in our lives and our accountability concerning them as mentioned in chapter 3), **I returned** (again), **and considered all the oppression** (oppression could also be translated “extortion” [e.g., The mate who says, “This is the way it is going to be or I’m out of here!” The child who says, “You just try to stop me and I’ll...”]), **that is done under the sun** (in general): **and look** (look around you, you see it too)! **The tears of the oppressed** (the world is full of weepers), **but** (the worst part about it is, under the sun), **they have no comforter** (no one to process the distress through, no one to support them in their oppression, no one to empathize with them in their distress and believe in them)—**On the side of their oppressors** (however), **there is power** (he has plenty of support, he’s getting his way, there seems to be no end to his influence and authority [e.g., the Roman Prince and Antichrist in the end times]), **but** (the oppressed), **they have no comforter**, (they are left alone, helpless, vulnerable, and hopeless—they have been wronged and there is no one to help them right it [e.g., slavery in the early years of our country]).

**F APPLICATION:**

Usually when we think of extortion, we think of blackmail or some other Mafia type action. Extortion can also come through a mate that says something like, “This is the way it’s going to be or I’m out of here!” It can also come from a child who says, “You try to stop me and I’ll ...”

**NOTES:**

Slavery in the south in the early years of our nation is easy to pic-

ture as being oppressive. But, there are other things that can enslave a person such as drugs, gambling, pornography, eating disorders, work, materialism, etc.

### b. Solomon's reaction, (2-3)

<sup>2</sup> **Therefore** (seeing that the oppressed are completely at the mercy of the oppressors), **I praised the dead who were already dead, more than the living who are still alive**, (I thought, how lucky they are to be out of this mess. It is better to be dead than alive, than to live under the sun in such continual merciless, comfortless oppression and despair).

<sup>3</sup> **Yet, better** (still), **than both is he who has never existed, who has not seen** (experienced first hand), **the evil work that is done under the sun**, (how cruel, even insane, life can be under the sun).

### F APPLICATION:

A disturbed and deeply troubled individual went to a psychiatrist to relieve his oppression. He awoke melancholy every morning, and he went to bed in the evening deeply depressed. His day was marked by darkness and clouds. He couldn't find relief for this oppression. In his desperate condition, he decided to seek the counsel of a medical doctor. The psychiatrist listened to him for almost an hour. Finally, he leaned toward his patient and said to him, "You know, there's a local show at a theater. I understand a new Italian clown has come into our city, and he's leaving 'em in the aisles. He's getting rave reviews from the critics. Maybe he is the one that will bring back your happiness. Why don't you go see this professional clown and laugh your troubles away?"

With a dejected expression, the patient muttered, "Doctor, I am that clown.

How cruel, even insane life can be under the sun for those who are oppressed with no Comforter.

It is important to notice here that Solomon never mentions suicide. He says that it is better to be dead than alive (living a life of oppression under the sun), and the very best scenario is to not even have been born. Why is it better not to have even been born? Solomon told us, so we don't have to experience this oppression first hand or watch those we love go through it. He presents life as a no choice issue; a must experience if you are alive.

At the same time, most of us have experienced severe enough oppression or distress that we have thought it would be better to not have been born as Solomon mentions., but many of us have even thought about ending our life. Maybe it was a divorce or some other very significant relationship. Maybe someone very close to you died. Maybe everything in your life seemed to be going wrong. Maybe you did

### NOTES:

something terribly wrong and didn't feel you could face it, or the person it involved, or would hurt. Maybe it was facing some serious financial troubles or addiction. Maybe you are riding an emotional roller coaster with a wayward child. Most of us have been hurt, scared, tired, angry, lonely, or oppressed enough as Solomon says to rather be dead than alive, or better yet, even born. Maybe you have been there several times throughout your present life. Maybe you are thinking, "That's were I live!" That may be so, and life is oppressive and despairing enough at times to cause us to think these things. But brethren, remember that is living life under the sun. We have to get above it!

Listen to some of the distress some of the characters in God's Word.

Jeremiah 12:1-2—*Righteous are You, O Lord, when I plead with You; Yet let me talk with You about Your judgments. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously? 2 You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; They grow, yes, they bear fruit. You are near in their mouth But far from their mind.*

Habakkuk 1:13—*You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours A person more righteous than he?*

Job 3:11; 21:7—*11 "Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb? 7 Why do the wicked live and become old, Yes, become mighty in power?*

David—Psalm 73:2-8, 12, 14, 16—*But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. 3 For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men. 6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment. 7 Their eyes bulge with abundance; They have more than heart could wish. 8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; They speak loftily. . . 12 Behold, these are the ungodly, Who are always at ease; They increase in riches. . . 14 For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning. . . 16 When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me—*

All of these men and many more men and women, boys and girls went though these feelings of deep confusion, loneliness, oppression and despair. Until that is, they did as King David did and moved from living under the sun to living above the sun. David says in Psalm 73:17-20—[when] *I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end. 18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. 19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. 20 As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image.* When David finally looked up above the

sun he realized *as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.* (2-3)

1 Corinthians 10:13—*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

God's own Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. It was the Father's will that the Son be there, and Jesus did not leave until all three temptations were over. He met the temptations head-on. He "escaped" the temptations by enduring them in His Father's power.

God provides three ways for us to endure temptation [or oppression]: prayer, trust, and focusing on Jesus Christ.

"Keep watching and praying, that you may not come into temptation," Jesus told His disciples (Mark 14:38). If we do not pray, we can be sure a test will turn into temptation. Our first defense in a test or a trial is to pray, to turn to our heavenly Father and put the matter in His hands. [To move from living under the sun to above it. If you don't you are going to stumble and slip as David said he almost did. We need to go to God's sanctuary in prayer, and look at the situation through God's eyes to see the situation from God's perspective like David.]

Second, we must trust. When we pray we must pray believing that the Lord will answer and help us. We also trust that, whatever the origin of the trial [or oppression], God has allowed it to come for our good, to prove our faithfulness. God has a purpose for everything that comes to His children, and when we are tested or tempted [or oppressed] we should gladly endure it in His power—for the sake of His glory and of our spiritual growth.

Third, we should focus on our Lord Jesus Christ. "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin" (Heb. 12:3-4). Christ endured more than we could ever be called on to endure. He understands our trials and He is able to take us through them.

In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* Christian and Hopeful fall asleep in a field belonging to giant Despair. The giant finds them and takes them into Doubting Castle, where he puts them in a dark and stinking dungeon, without food or water. On his wife's advice, the giant first beats them mercilessly and then suggests they commit suicide. After the giant leaves, the two companions discuss what they should do. Finally Christian remembers the key in his pocket. "I have a key in my bosom called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle." Sure enough, it opened all the doors in the castle and even the gate. "Then they went on, and came to the King's highway again."<sup>1</sup>

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 **COMMENTARY:**

<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, Logos Library System.

You don't have a key in your pocket, but you do have a God who created you above. He is the key to your daily life, and in Him you will find comfort, (2 Cor. 1:3-6).

## (2) The handling of power in the work force, (4-6)

### a. Solomon's observation, (4, 5)

- <sup>4</sup> (Disgusted with what he saw in the "halls of justice," ["the misuse of power in the social arena] the king went down to the marketplace to watch the various laborers at work. Surely he would not be disappointed there, for honest toil is a gift from God.)<sup>2</sup> **Again, I saw that for all** (the hard), **toil and every skillful work** (well done job), **a man is envied by his neighbor**, ("*envied*" here is "Not only the feeling of jealousy, but the competitiveness that sparks the desire to outdo the other, is meant (*homo homini lupus*, "human rivalry is wolf-like" [Prov. 14:30]).<sup>3</sup> **This also** (then), **is vanity and grasping for the wind**, (because it creates a vicious cycle of always trying to outdo and out shine your last accomplishment and everyone else's as well. There is no lasting satisfaction because the competition is always on your tail. It's a dog eat dog world out there.)
- <sup>5</sup> **The fool** (at the other end of the spectrum—is no better off for he), **folds his hands and consumes his own flesh**, (in other words he is so lazy that he destroys his life and health by not even providing proper nourishment for himself [Prov. 6:10, 11]).

### b. Solomon's conclusion, (6)

- <sup>6</sup> **Better a** (open), **handful** (i.e., a palm full of gain), **with quietness** (rest, tranquillity [*rested*" in Ex. 4:4]), **than both hands** (cupped), **full, together** (of gain), **with toil and grasping** (anxiously striving), **for the wind**. (scraping, fighting, pushing, digging, climbing, building, sacrificing for more handfuls of gain (Prov. 15:16; 16:8; 17:1)

Nobody can put this issue in perspective like a little child. Listen to this first-grader who became curious because her father brought home a briefcase full of papers every evening.

When she brought it up, her mother explained, "Daddy has so much to do that he can't finish it all at the office. That's why he has to bring work home at night." "Well, then," responded the child innocently, "why don't they put him in a slower group?"

Dad, mom, if this is you, slow down...slow down for yourself, for your spouse, and for your children. God says you are grasping after the wind.

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. *Be satisfied* (Ec 4:4). Logos Library System.

<sup>3</sup> Murphy Roland, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 23a: Ecclesiastes*, Logos Library System.

Keep in mind though, I am not saying being busy is wrong.

NOTES:

“ Being busy is not a sin. Jesus was busy. Paul was busy. Peter was busy. Nothing of significance is achieved without effort and hard work and weariness. That, in and of itself, is not a sin. But being busy in a pursuit of things that leave us [and our family] empty and hollow and broken inside--that cannot be pleasing to God. ”<sup>4</sup>

The 16th-century Reformers didn't treat work as "careerism" as we do. Instead, they viewed all secular and full-time Christian work as divine vocations. No wonder we suffer from burnout. We are clueless when it comes to understanding our jobs and God's view of them.

True, we work because God has ordained us to work--to care for His creation, to earn a living, and to do His work while there is yet time. We want to avoid slothfulness, which the Bible condemns, and we want to be diligent workers like God.

However, we must be careful not to give work more significance than the Bible does. Otherwise, we will end up in burnout. We misunderstand work when we think that work and productivity are the same--they aren't. God doesn't evaluate our work on the basis of our

productivity, net worth, or accolades received. We don't need to look for our identity or self-esteem through work. God, in His grace, has gifted His children with their identity. We work not to gain our identity but as a response to God's grace. We thank the Lord through our work and best efforts.

When our efforts are thus misdirected, it's no wonder we suffer from physical, psychological, and spiritual burnout.

God created the Sabbath before He directed mankind to work.<sup>5</sup>

Matthew Henry comments concerning verse 6, “Moderate pains and moderate gains will do best.”<sup>6</sup>

A 1989 Harris survey revealed that the amount of leisure time enjoyed by the average American had shrunk 37 percent from 1973. This suggests that fewer people know how to keep life in balance. They are caught in the rat race and don't know how to escape.<sup>7</sup>

"A rich industrialist from the North was horrified to find a Southern fisherman lying lazily beside his boat looking up at the sky. 'Why aren't you out fishing?' asked the industrialist.

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<sup>4</sup> Max Lucado (quoted in Luis Palau Responds E-zine, Jun 15, 2000, page 1) Topic: BUSYNESS

<sup>5</sup> "Burnout: the cause and the cure for a Christian malady" by Stanley Grenz. *Currents in Theology & Mission*, . Pages 425-430. Topic: burnout.

<sup>6</sup> Henry, M. *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible*: Logos Library System.

<sup>7</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. *Be satisfied* (Ec 4:4). Logos Library System.

"'Because I have caught enough fish for the day,' said the fisherman.

"'Why don't you catch more than you need?' asked the industrialist.

"'What would I do with it?' asked the fisherman.

"'You could earn more money,' was the reply. 'With what you sell your extra fish for you could get a better boat and motor; you could go into deeper waters and catch more fish. You could buy nylon nets. You could catch more fish and make more money. Soon you could have two boats, then a fleet of boats, employees, and a real business. Then you would be rich like me.'

"The fisherman asked, 'Then what would it do?'

"The industrialist said, 'Then you could take it easy and enjoy life.'

"'What do you think I'm doing now?' asked the fisherman."

[The Recovery Bible, Zondervan, 1993.]

A person may have only but a handful of the world, and yet may enjoy it and himself with a great deal of *quietness*, with content of mind, peace of conscience, and the love and good-will of his family and neighbours, while many that have both their hands full, have more than heart could wish, have a great deal of pain and exasperation with it. Those that cannot live on a little, will be even less happy with more.

God tells us in Proverbs that:

- Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great wealth with turmoil.
- Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred.
- Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice.
- Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife. (Prov. 15:16-17; 16:8; 17:1)

Listen to me carefully and think about this for the rest of the week.

If you were hit and killed by a big truck today, you'd be replaced at work tomorrow, or very shortly after. But you will never be replaced at home. You'd be missed there forever. Stop giving your family the leftovers of yourself.

I would like to suggest that you by a book and work through it with your mate. The book is *The Questions Book: for Marriage Intimacy*, by Dennis & Barbara Rainey. Some of the questions the Rainey's ask are:

- What do you think have been the five most important milestones we've passed together? Why was each so important to you?
- I what single way would you most like to see me grow personally in the next twelve months?
- What two or three problems, if solved, would make the most positive difference in our marriage and family?

- What do you see as the three most important decisions we need to make in the next year? Why are they important? Toward what choices are you leaning in each area? What would help us most to make each decision wisely?
- If you knew you had just six more months to live, how would you spend them? What would you do? Where would you want to go?
- What's heavy on your shoulders? Where do you feel you're "going under"? Is there any way I can help? How can I make our life easier or better? How can I help you really win in life?

### (3) The handling of power in the area of benevolence, (7-12)

#### a. Solomon's observation, (7, 8)

<sup>7</sup> **Then I returned** (to view life from yet another aspect of life), **and I saw** (that it too was), **vanity under the sun**, (full of futility, emptiness):

<sup>8</sup> **There is one** (who although lives among people, is yet), **alone, without companion** (to work in partnership with and/or mate to live life with): **He has neither son nor brother** (family of any kind). **Yet** (even though he has no one to spend his wealth on, or to pass his inheritance on to) **there is no end to all his labors, Nor is his eye satisfied with riches**, (he always looks for bigger profits, better benefits, additional perks). **But he never asks, "For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?"** (Who am I working so hard for, and why do I sacrifice the personal contentment and enjoyment that life has to offer in order to amass even more wealth? What is the incentive of this madness? Who will be the beneficiaries of my wealth?) **This also is vanity** (craziness), **and a grave misfortune**, (to amass such a cache of wealth that you neither enjoy or share—to say nothing of who will end-up inheriting it).

#### F APPLICATION:

Some negative biblical examples concerning benevolence: Luke 12:15-21—the man whose barns were full; Matthew 19:16-22—the rich young ruler; Luke 16:19-31—the rich man and Lazerous.

#### Singles reluctant to marry, settle down

"Singles seeking self-fulfillment or soul mate?" by Timothy Dailey. *Washington Watch*, Jly 2001 (Vol 12, No 9).

Many young single adults are dreaming of a future that discounts lifelong commitment and the traditional nuclear family with children. ...Increasingly, young adults treat spouses or live-in partners like cars to be traded in when newer models appear.

...Don Feder of the Boston *Herald* points to a large shift in popular culture in past decades. Movies and advertising, he says, "have continuously inculcated certain attitudes:

singleness is swell; sex can be separated from marriage; a woman without a career is pathetic; a career (as measured by power and money) is all-important; personal gratification is life's highest goal." [This flies in the face of what God says.]

The Greek philosopher Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living."<sup>8</sup>

If you are climbing the ladder of success, would you pause just a moment wherever you are in that process? Stop and hang on a moment right there. While you are hanging on to that rung, ask yourself, "What is going to be the advantage of fighting, sacrificing, clawing my way to the next one?" Can you make a promise to yourself that you will not reach for the next rung until you can sincerely and satisfactorily answer this next question? "If I am not satisfied or happy here, what will climbing to the next rung change that all the others didn't so I'll be satisfied or happy there?" God tells us that the human eye of desire will never be satisfied. If you are laboring as one who lives under the sun, you will never be satisfied with the rung you are presently standing on or the next one, or hundred. So we must labor in a way that is above the sun.

Matthew Henry can help us here by his comments on this verse. He asks, "Do I labour, as I should, for the glory of God, and that I may have to give to those that need? Do I consider that it is but for the body that I am labouring, a dying body; it is for others, and I know not for whom—perhaps for a fool, that will scatter it as fast as I have gathered it—perhaps for a foe, that will be ungrateful to my memory?"<sup>9</sup> (cp., Luke 12:15-21 [Provide by giving to our: household, the Lord's work and the needy])

Giving, not amassing, is an essential ingredient of our labor and faith. Especially in the areas of worship and service.

When King David sinned against God by numbering the people of Israel, David asked God to forgive him and set out to worship God with a burnt offering. "the king said to Araunah [when he offered to give David his oxen and wood for free], "No, but I will surely buy *it* from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. (2 Sam. 24:24)

Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 5:8 that, "if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an [atheist or heretic]."

In Acts 20:35, shortly after the inception of the church, God tells us through Paul, "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

<sup>8</sup> Wiersbe, *Be satisfied* (Ec 4:4).

<sup>9</sup> *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible*: Complete and unabridged in one volume (Ec 4:7).

God couldn't make it any clearer than He does in 1 Corinthians 10:31. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

### b. Solomon's conclusion, (9-12)

- <sup>9</sup> **Two are better than one**, (having a partner, friend, companion, is better than having none—i.e., living by yourself and for yourself), **Because they have a good reward** (a greater return or advantage), **for their labor**.
- <sup>10</sup> **For if they fall** (into difficult times—whatever the reason), **one will lift up** (comfort, assist, encourage), **his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls** (into difficult times), **For he has no one to help him up**, (to walk with him along that rough road).
- <sup>11</sup> **Again** (in like manner), **if two lie down together, they will** (obviously), **keep warm; But how can one be warm alone?**
- <sup>12</sup> **Though one may** (also), **be overpowered by another** (in some kind of attack [whether physical or accusatory]), **two can withstand him. And a threefold cord** (friendship is even better because it), **is not quickly broken**.

### F APPLICATION:

The person who walks through life alone faces the temptations, successes (e.g., David numbering the growing nation of Israel—Joab tried to warn him), and hardships of life alone as well. He does not enjoy and benefit from the good company that could stand beside him all the time, but especially during hard times. It has been said, "A [detached] life was surely never intended for a state of perfection, nor should those be reckoned the greatest lovers of God who cannot find in their hearts to love any one else."<sup>10</sup>

God tells us in 1 John 4:7-8, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." One may be very adept at attaining success, but if he is inept at establishing and maintaining loving relationships, he is living under the sun—vanity and a grave misfortune. Loving and serving others is a proper and powerful act of charity. God says it is to be given as well as received. Withholding it or not accepting it is a grave misuse of the power of benevolence. We are to love our neighbor as our self.

### Campuses swarm with overachievers

"The organization kid" by David Brooks. *Atlantic Monthly*, Apr 2001 (Vol 287, No 4). Pages 40-54.

A visit to Princeton University reveals the character of today's young people. These kids are nothing like the Woodstock generation of 30 years ago. Now college students at elite institutions are driven to succeed. These are the future workaholics of America.

<sup>10</sup> *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible*: Complete and unabridged in one volume (Ec 4:7).

...The attitudes of college students have been shaped by hard-driving parents who have trained their offspring to be equally manic about success. From early childhood, today's collegians have been trained and drilled to excel. Everything in their lives was planned, from play dates to athletic involvement, to increase the odds of future success.

The great deficit of college students of today is in the area of morals. It's not that they have none. Rather, their morals consist of banalities that have been sanctioned by the group; consensus is their highest value, self-fulfillment their highest goal. They hold no beliefs forged by struggle or questioning. They are clueless about what constitutes a virtuous life.

#### **(4) The handling of power in the area of popularity or status, (13-16)**

Why do some people want big, fast and expensive sports cars or boats? Especially when they really can't afford them! Why do people want to be friends with or rub shoulders with popular or influential people? Why do some people run for president of the United States, some other office or organization? Where are you concerning these matters?

##### **a. Solomon's observation, (13)**

<sup>13</sup> **Better a poor** (poverty-stricken), **and** (yet), **wise youth than an old** (seasoned), **and** (yet), **foolish** (wealthy and powerful), **king who will be admonished no more**, (who will not listen to good advice or heed a prudent warning from his administrative counsel—a wise youth has a future, but a foolish king does not. It's better to be wise than a fool).

##### **b. Solomon's conclusion, (14-16) [Why is it better to be wise than a fool?]**

<sup>14</sup> **For he** (the youth), **comes out of prison** (the confinements of destitution), **to be king** (instead of the old and foolish one), **Although he was born** (a) **poor** (subject), **in his** (the foolish kings), **kingdom**.

<sup>15</sup> **I saw all the living** (subjects), **who walk under the sun** (who make up this kingdom); **They were with** (at the side of), **the second youth** (the wise youth or his successor), **who stands in his** (the foolish kings or the wise youths), **place**.

<sup>16</sup> **There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king** (it was a large and prosperous kingdom); **Yet those who come afterward** (the next generations), **will not rejoice in him**, (be happy with the direction he wishes to lead them and/or his leadership skills). **Surely this also** (then—finding our ultimate purpose and fulfillment in being popular or influential), **is vanity and grasping for the wind**, (it will not fill the void).

**F APPLICATION:**

Popular people or people who hold important positions appear to have it all. Fancy cars, expensive houses, lots of people around them, money to burn, and well traveled.

God tells us here though, that power, popularity, and prestige are poor goals for a life's work. Although many seek them, and some attain them, none can hold them as they are like trying to hold the wind. People under their leadership are fickle, changing quickly and easily.

Oliver Cromwell, who took the British throne away from Charles I and established the Commonwealth, said to a friend, "Do not trust to the cheering, for those persons would shout as much if you and I were going to be hanged." Cromwell understood crowd psychology!<sup>11</sup>

Think about this. At one moment the crowds were hurling on the road palm branches and the cloaks off their backs crying out to Jesus, "Hosanna, Hosanna glory to God in the highest." The next moment the same people were hurling spit, punches and curses at Christ, crying out, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him."

You can literally be Jesus Christ; loved one moment and hated the next! Thus Solomon says, "If you are trying to find meaning to life through being popular or influence—forget it. It's like grasping after the wind.

Some examples of leaders who lived above the sun are Joseph, David and Daniel. Some examples of leaders who lived under the sun are Rehoboam, Belshazzar and Herod.

A good leader is a great servant. That is leading above the sun. Whether in your home, business, ministry, or as the President of the United States. You will never know what a person stands for if he is worried about the public polls, because people are like the waves of the sea.

What are friends for? First lets look at what friends are not.

Friends:

1. Are not persons you discard when they hurt you or when they are going through some hard times.
2. Are not more interested in getting than giving. To use them and take advantage of them?
3. Are not persons you use to get something for yourself like status, power or connections.
4. Do not jeopardize your safety or health.
5. Do not encourage you to do things that go against your standards.
6. Do not try to isolate you from others so they can have you for themselves.

<sup>11</sup>Wiersbe, W. W. *Be satisfied* (Ec 4:13).

Friends are:

NOTES:

- 1. To help each other enjoy the lighter side of life.** Yes, life is serious. It is so serious that if you don't step back from it once in awhile—it will kill you. Laughter or a cheerful heart is a great medicine Proverbs 17:22 tells us. It is then, one of the means by which God expects us to utilize in facing life's challenges and changes. We bring humor into one another's life by making a funny face, responding with a witty remark, sharing cartoons, funny jokes, or outrageous cards. Sometimes it's doing a prank or giving a prank gift. Other times it's just doing something that is out of the ordinary.
- 2. To be painfully honest with each other when we need a realignment.** God tells us in Proverbs 27:66 that "Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend..." Sometimes it is necessary to bring some pain or frustration into a friend's life. It may be that we need an attitude adjustment. Other times we need to be told we are headed down the wrong road. (Not accepting constructive criticism—allowing our emotions to run our life—have the poor me syndrome—getting a chip on our shoulder, etc.)
- 3. To push each other beyond the boundaries of one's comfort zone.** We are told in Proverbs 27:17 that, "As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend." As friends we are to press one another to take steps to stretch our boundaries of security. It may be to take a college course we think would be too hard, or to shift to a new career, or to trust someone not to use you but to genuinely help you, or to try out for a sport or an instrument that you would like to take. Like the prayer of Jabez when he prayed that God would expand his borders, his horizons.
- 4. To encourage each other, (1 Cor. 13).** You encourage each other with words, money, possessions, time and other resources. You do whatever it takes to help your friend to succeed in godly ways. You believe in each other as individuals and in each other's dreams. Weaknesses and even failures cannot separate you from the hope you have in your friend to succeed. You trust your friend making yourself vulnerable to him or her. You believe in and support each other with the promises of God. They help us to see the things that are going right in our life when everything seems to be going wrong. God commands us in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 to "...warn those who are unruly, comfort [or encourage] the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all."
- 5. To mentor and be mentored by one another.** You are instructed in 2 Timothy 2:22 to take, "the things that [you have learned and] commit [them] to [other] faithful [individuals] who will be able to teach others also." (cp., Titus 2:1-8 [older men and women are to teach the younger]) Your sphere of friendships should include someone who is older and wiser than you are who can assist you in your journey towards maturity as well as include someone younger and than you that you can mentor.

**6. To be committed to each other.** God tells us in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 that, “Two *are* better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him *that is* alone when he falleth; for *he hath* not another to help him up.” Friends don’t dump each other when things get tough. They are committed to being at one another’s side through thick and thin.

The chapter ... emphasizes balance in life. “Better is a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind” (v. 6, NKJV). It’s good to have the things that money can buy, provided you don’t lose the things that money can’t buy. What is it really costing you *in terms of life* to get the things that are important to you? How much of the permanent are you sacrificing to get your hands on the temporary?<sup>12</sup>

Friendships and careers that are based on wrong principles are doomed to fail. Even those that are based on good ones can be touch and go. What kind of friend are you? What kind of friendships do you have and continue to pursue? What are the positions of authority and power that you hold? What is your purpose for being in that position? To serve or be served?

Many people are going to love you and hate you at the drop of the hat. So you will not find any permanent meaning and fulfillment to life in being popular and/or influential. Being wise in these areas is better than being a fool. Remember, Jesus found meaning and contentment in who He was and fulfilling God’s will for His life. Jesus’ disciples often let Him down and outright failed Him many times—but Jesus never forsook them. He was committed to his disciples.

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<sup>12</sup>Wiersbe, W. W. *Be satisfied* (Ec 4:13).