

They push your button and you perform and if you don't, they'll get somebody else who will.

And when you verbalize your frustration it's often met with: "If you can't hack it then we'll get somebody who can. And if you don't move where we want you to move and go and do what we want you to do, then you can just find yourself something else."

The world has that attitude:

Get all you can, can all you get, then poison all the rest of it.

And everything is done for the sake of the corporation.

You remember the three things that I said about somebody who's going through mid-life crisis? They sure fit into the corporate treadmill or into the world where you live:

1. We view life selfishly rather than socially.

I mean, it's dog-eat-dog out there, isn't it? I mean, nobody's looking out for nobody but number one.

2. You view life apart from God rather than controlled by God.

I mean, that's totally secular out there, right? No sacred in that stuff.

3. Life is bounded by the grave and has no destiny beyond it.
“Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.” (1 Cor. 15:32)

Everything that the guy going through a mid-life crisis is facing is exactly what you live every day in the secular world and in the business that you perform. So is it any wonder that you face a great opportunity to have a mid-life crisis.

Your life coincides with what a guy's going through when he faces it.

I want you to see that in context today.

It's one thing to be fighting against God and whatever will be will be, but it's another thing to see actually human beings oppressing others and causing them by their power to experience comfort.

And that's where the study opens today—chapter 4, verse 1. So pick up with me and see it in that context. It just makes the thing jump out at you. It'll be incredible when you get through. You'll say “Wow! I can't believe that's there!”

v. 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.

Do you think Solomon could view life from both sides of the spectrum? Who is he? I mean, he's president of a major corporation. He is king of the land.

Do you think he ever had a Watergate in his administration? Do you think he ever had anybody who misappropriated funds? Do you think he ever had to hire anybody and then fire somebody? And do you ever think that he experienced resignations and people more interested in lobbying for personal interests rather than doing the job for the sake of the kingdom?

I think he did. And I think what he is saying here is something that he has felt and he's experienced a high level, competitive spirit—living in a world of dog-eat-dog. And he can speak of a boss who says “Don't bother to take off your coat.”

And it always seems to happen when you least expect it. If it's fighting God in chapter 3, it's fighting man here now in chapter 4. And he's upset about it. He doesn't like it, naturally.

What happens when you experience a job loss? Or let's say a change in your life with regard to your location? Well there are **FOUR THINGS** that usually happens:

1. You become extremely **LONELY**. You feel like you have been cut off from your world.

We were meeting in a bank on Monday night in Camden and one of the guys who had come was just released by that bank. That was the most painful thing in the world for him to come down there and sit in a Bible study in that community room of that bank because he had just been asked to go because of a corporate shake-up in the thing.

Traumatic sense of isolation and loneliness that none of the rest of us felt.

2. You feel LEFT OUT. I mean, everything that you've lived for now is just gone—wiped out.
3. You've had a tremendous blow to your SELF-IMAGE. It's almost the same way that a woman feels when she's been replaced by another woman. She feels a tremendous loss in her self-image.
4. HURT—just flat hurt by the misunderstanding that takes place.

Now what is he say here?

Solomon says:

“[In their] tears...power [is] on the side of [the] oppressors—and they have no comforter.”

There's nobody to come around and say “I understand.”

There's nobody to say "I really care. I'd really like to help."

Now that's not true of the Christian, is it?

The Christian in John 14 has the comforter, the Holy Spirit, who comes alongside to sustain. (John 14:26, 27)

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1 that God the Father is the God of all comfort, who comforts us in the midst of these oppressive circumstances. (2 Cor. 1:3-5)

It was C. S. Lewis who said:

God whispers in our pleasures but He shouts to us in our pain."

(source unknown)

Lord, I am drowning in a sea of perplexity
Waves of confusion crash over me.
I am too weak to shout for help
Either quiet the waves or lift me above them.
It's too late to learn to swim.

(source unknown)

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie
My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply
The flames shall not hurt thee I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

(source unknown)

To the believer, pain plants the flag of reality in the fortress of a rebel heart. And maybe through this trial and through this heartbreak God is going to bring something really wonderful out of it that you really know nothing about. And the responsibility of the believer in the midst of this is to deem it pure joy when you go through various trials and testings.

You say oh, I'm supposed to get a Cheshire cat grin on my face and say "Oh good! I lost my job!"

No. Perhaps you can see the sovereign hand of God at work in a new and wonderful way of moving you into something you never thought of before.

You know, this very guy that I was telling you about on Monday night, we prayed that first Monday night that God would open up a door and they moved this week. They moved clear to another town. They've got a fabulous job waiting for them. The home opened up. They sold the house in a day in town after we finished praying there around the table. The guy said, "man you have got a hotline. This has all happened in one week and we've got the stuff in the car and this is our last night. We'll see you."

I said "You've got a new mission field."

You see, so many times we just look at the situation and we say "Hey, nothing good can come out of that."

Hold it just a minute. If you'll surrender to it and if you'll yield

to it, God will really work.

You know I told you about George Kemble and I had the funeral Friday morning at ten o'clock for a little 3 ½ year old boy, and I was exhausted last Thursday night when I was hear with you. And really went to bed without any real peace about it because how are you going to tell some parents that it is God's purpose for a 3 ½ year old little boy to go to be with the Lord?

Now I didn't have any insights, needless to say, when I fell asleep. But I got about 5:30 and went over to Jesuit to do my run and while I was running, God gave me a real insight that I was able to share with everybody at the funeral.

God sort of said, remember the day you went to the races? They had some 5Ks and some 10Ks and they had some half marathons and they had the marathon, and some guys even run 50 and 100 milers. He said, who are you to question that little George ran a 5K? I mean, he ran that well and he finished. And that's all that's necessary.

I was able to show that to the family because they were a real running family and helped them to realize that God in His sovereign purpose had little George here for 3 ½ years, that's all. And then He took little George home. And I reminded them that we had dedicated that little nipper about a year and a half ago to the Lord. And the Lord just took us up on our offer. And it's our responsibility in a situation like that is to surrender to His sovereign purpose and trust Him to know

what's best. And to not look back.

The hard thing in the mid-life crisis is when we resist it—when we fight it. We're being oppressed and we're fighting God and His sovereign purpose. And whatever will be, will be. And then we turn around and we're fighting man in the same way. Rather than through those struggles to see a sovereign God trying to mold us and to make us with His hammer and His file and His furnace, into what He wants us to become.

André Crouch sings a song called “Through It All” that probably tells it better than I can ever say it:

I've had many tears and sorrows
I've had questions for tomorrow.
There've been times I didn't know right from wrong
But in every situation God gave blessed consolation
That my trials come to only make me strong.

I've been a lot of places and I've seen a lot of faces
There've been times I've felt so all alone.
But in my lonely hours, yes, those precious lonely hours
Jesus let me know that I was His own.

I thank God for the mountains and I thank Him for the
valleys
I thank Him for the storms He brought me through
For if I'd never had a problem,
I wouldn't know He could solve them.
I'd never know what faith in God could do.

Through it all, through it all
Oh I've learned to trust in Jesus,
I've learned to trust in God.
Through it all, through it all,
I've learned to depend upon His word.
(source unknown)

That song will never be the same to me.

One dear guy that I led to the Lord, 22-years-old, water skiing one day playing on an inner-tube and the boat turned too quick and he became a 50 cent piece, skipping along the shore and died instantly as he hit a tree.

His wife, pregnant with their second child, went through that and four weeks later I asked her if she'd sing for the church. She had a very beautiful voice. And she says "I will sing but I'll only sing one song and it's *Through It All*." And what a testimony and a witness that is.

Just maybe God is allowing you to go through your heartbreak and your trial and your suffering so you can demonstrate to the world around you that God is faithful, as you submit and surrender to it.

Do you realize you're sitting right now and looking at a guy that went through a job loss before this ministry was ever born?

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You know, I came to Texas back in 1967 from a very, very wonderful ministry in the Northwest. I was very happy, fulfilled, running a ski lodge and a summer camp and also involved in a major conference center. Having a great time writing Bible studies for counselors and campers and had 5 great years, but I was asked to come to Texas to help start a new camp.

This was going to be our camp. This was going to be our vision. As a result, I formed the camp, my wife did all the cooking, and that camp grew to be quite a conference grounds by 1972. But the conflict between the board and Don Anderson got to the place where it was so great that I was going to have to go out and start raising funds for that camp. But my whole lifestyle was on the brink of being changed. They realized that I was no longer a part of something I had helped bring into existence.

I'll tell you, I turned in my prophet's badge in November of '72 and I said "God, thanks a lot but I've got 5 kids—4 of whom are ready to go to college. I don't have any money saved and I'm at zero dollars, I'm going to go sell insurance and I'm going to put my kids through school."

And it was about 6-8 weeks later that I was handed a paper for a non-profit corporation and that was the beginning of this traveling and teaching ministry.

You know, the height of it all comes on the day that I'm invited back to speak at the conference grounds and my wife

says “Thank God we are not here!” You know. You look back over these ten years and you realize what God had in store, how we could have resisted it.

Job says:

Job 23:10

He knows the way that I take and when he tried me I shall come forth as gold.

When you are meeting opposition on both the vertical and horizontal levels, it gets pretty lonely and there’s really a consuming desire to flick it in. And Solomon is there today. He is hurt. And I think when you find sometimes that you’re fighting against God and man both; suicide is really a viable option. I think that’s the reason a lot of people take their lives at this particular point because they’re fighting both a vertical and a horizontal battle. And he has no self-image left.

Verse 2.

v. 2 And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive.

Boy he is hurt. And healing is not going to come into his life until he gets his eyes off his own picking circumstances and gets them back on the Lord.

He’s saying “Man, these people that have already made it and

have died, are far better off than the rest of us who are sitting around here alive.”

v. 3 But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.

Being born starts it all and good grief! A guy who hasn't even been born yet, has it a whole lot better because this is a dog-eat-dog world out here. And he just hates it.

God is working in his life.

You know, there's a book called *Stewardship of Sorrow* that has a great illustration of how you can wrongly relate to your circumstances and what it can do to you. It's the story that's told of this guy who is a bird financier and he had two birds. He had a starling in one cage and he had a canary in the other. And they were in ideal circumstances and they had all the food that they could eat and all the water they could drink.

He put them in the cages in the morning and left them for the day. The starling immediately, wild by nature, began beating its wings against the cage in rebellion and screeching and hollering. And just fighting and flapping. The canary goes, has some food and some water, surveys its bars, goes to the highest perch and begins to sing.

At nightfall the starling is nothing but a mass of bloody

plumage in the bottom of the cage. And the canary is still singing, swinging by its perch.
(source unknown)

Now, that's relating to your circumstances. And the difference between Solomon right now in what he's going through is, he's fighting it. And the only way to bring about a solution to it is to surrender.

You know I come to you with another heavy burden. It just seems like I'm getting them week after week. But Sunday I got news that the guy who does all of our printing, who's been responsible for these tape covers, for the newsletters. He has printed for us as a young man—I say he's in his early 40s—by the name of Doug Jayroe. Doug is terminal, laying in a hospital in Tyler, very near physical death. I'm hoping I can get home before he dies.

We have been inseparable over the last 10 years. He has sacrificed, given the shirt off his back and never charged us for this printing. The only thing we do is let him go to camp with his family or something in repayment, or do some things that we can do. But this guy has made a fabulous contribution and here he is, you know, ready to go home to be with the Lord.

And I was sharing with Betty this afternoon on the phone, trying to comfort her, I said “You know, right now is your greatest opportunity be a witness for the Lord.” And she says “I don't know how I can be a witness for the Lord.”

I said, “By surrendering to this. By allowing people to see that you’re really letting go of Doug and you’re trusting God in these circumstances and you’ll magnify Christ in that.”

Solomon could have been so different. He could have solved this crisis. He could have solved this whole problem if he just would have magnified the Lord and seen the Lord in the situation. But here he’s still fighting and so he has this super crummy attitude, as though God is trying to hurt him. And that God is trying to harm him in some way.

And the one real key to the solution is to surrender to the things as they are as submission to the Father’s direction. Then you bring glory to Him and you’re a witness to others around you.

It may not be the way I want it but I’ve got to learn to express my joy in my submission to those circumstances.

Verse 4.

v. 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.

Now it’s competitive. I mean, the Joneses got a swimming pool. We’ve got to get one. They got a tennis course. We’ve got to get a tennis court. I mean, they got a new car. We’ve got to get a new car. They got a boat. We’ve got to get a boat.

It is a constant drive of competition to be ahead of somebody else materialistically. So he not only sees the oppression of job loss and all of that, but he sees that competition seething between people who are climbing the ladder with all of their desire and all of their drive, trying to get something.

You know for the believer, shame on you. If that's the way you're living, you're not going to be happy.

The difference would be that if God could take all that drive and like the Lord said "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day for the night is coming when no man can work." (John 9:4)

Put all of your competition, all of your desire to achieve in the direction of doing something significant so that when you get to be with the Lord, there'll be something there to look at.

That's why Paul says "I drive toward the mark" (Philippians chapter 3) "for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ." (Phil. 3:14)

So he can say "I fought a good fight, I finished the course, I kept the faith." (2 Tim. 4:7)

That's the key for this.

But he says there's envy and there's strife all around us.

Can you believe verse 5?

v. 5 The fool folds his hands and ruins himself.

Some people just give up. I mean, they're fighting God in chapter 3, they've lost their job and they're fighting man in chapter 4. And they just decide, "I'm just going to fold my arms and just give up!"

You know, I face this every day.

Dr. Knarr is my good friend in Tyler and we have affectionately what we call "The Body and Soul Clinic." He's given us 5 brand new offices. He's opened his own practice. He left his partnership so he has his own offices and he took an old meat market and he split it down the middle and he's got his examination rooms on one side and he put all the rest of us on the other side over here. And so I'm getting to see the sick and the dying a whole lot more, you know. And there's a little kitchen between us. So I'll sneak in there and look at the people out there and see what's up.

I said "Dick, I have never seen more fat people in all my life." And I said "You know, I can't believe it!" Sitting here in the kitchen are your nurses smoking, eating Dingdongs and drinking Dr. Pepper's! Boy, they're a great advertisement.

He said "Those people just don't care. You tell them that nutritionally they are what they eat, but that doesn't make any difference. They want you to stick them with something,

give them a pill and then they'll blame you for the way they feel and away they go.”

They're bent on ruining themselves. Now that's the sad thing about Doug. I tried to stop that guy from smoking and drinking but his liver is bleeding uncontrollably. And the guy just ruined himself. He's let things come into his life and pressure so that he's got to release it by drinking and puffing on the cigarettes and violating every nutritional fact that's known to man. And pretty soon the “chickens come home to roost.”

And here in the midst of this rebellion, the last thing he can do is go ahead and just ruin your body as your one last great act of defiance. And he folds his hands and he ruins himself. To heck with it! I'm throwing in the towel! I'm going to the house! I just give up. Eat, smoke and drink and no exercise. Flat not going to straighten myself—put me any stress.

That's the way the fool solves his problems, isn't it?

Verse 6.

Boy this is convicting isn't it. Man, you just didn't know this all was here.

v. 6 Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.

You know a guy who has really surrendered to the Lord is content with a whole lot less.

I think that that's one of the keys to really becoming a fulfilled individual—is just being content to live with a heck a lot less. And just be satisfied with what the Lord's given you.

Paul says in Philippians 4: “I've learned to be content no matter what the circumstances. I know how to be hungry. I know how to be full. I know how to have a lot. I know how to have a little. I've learned to rejoice in all things and I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:11-13 paraphrased)

I put Isaiah 26:3 here:

Isaiah 26:3

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee...

And then:

Isaiah 32:17

The work of righteousness shall be peace and the effect of it, quietness and assurance forever.

I was reading that little book by Fénelon that I've quoted so many times. I hope you finally got it and you read it—called

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Let Go. And this is what Fénelon says when it comes to this business about having things. He says:

“Living in continued peace but understand that peace does not depend upon the fervor of your devotion. The only thing you need to be concerned about is the direction of your will.”
(source unknown)

You will be at peace when you have surrendered, when you’ve thrown up the white flag and the direction of your will is to do whatever He wants you to do. And say “Ok God, I’m turning it over to You.” Then peace will result.

And he says “Better to have some peace and just one handful than fighting after two.”

Now he’s got another thing he’s going to say. Look at verse 7.

v. 7 Again I saw something meaningless under the sun:

What’s he seen? Well, first of all:

1. oppression—he’s seen powerful hurting people who are...it’s employer/employee relationships—being oppressed.

And then he’s seen:

2. competition—people trying to keep up with the Joneses.

And now he says there is a third thing I want to share with you—verse 8.

v. 8 There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. “For whom am I toiling,” he asked, “and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?” This too is meaningless—a miserable business!

See a guy toiling all alone. What happens when you just keep on rebelling? And you just keep on pouring yourself into your work? Well pretty soon your wife divorces you, she just can't put up with all the loneliness. And pretty soon your kids leave and go on and do their own thing. And you're looking up and saying “Why am I pouring myself into all this work?”

“For whom am I toiling...and why am I depriving myself of any enjoyment?”...“By all of the sacrifice as work? Nobody's going to get it. It's me against the system, I guess.” And the guy wakes up.

You know I told you I'd been studying John Denver's tapes because I'm convinced he's going through it since he's divorcing from Annie his sweetheart. And there's another song on the album called “Sleeping Alone.” Have you heard that one? It's on “Some Days are Diamonds. Listen to these words. They're classic.

“Sleeping Alone”

John Denver

For someone who's got everything life can still be rough
If things are what you're looking for
There's never quite enough.
And all the tea in China won't make a house a home.
You can be a millionaire and still be sleeping alone.

*Sleeping alone can make a bottle just about your dearest friend
Sleeping alone can make you swear to God this night will
never end.*

*You know that it's not company you are looking for.
You know it's not just pleasures, you know it's something more
You know it's not the answer, if it's not like coming home.
If the one who's there doesn't really care,
It's worse than sleeping alone.*

*For someone who's got everything, life can still be rough
If things are what you're looking for
There's never quite enough.
And all the gold that glitters won't make a house a home
You can be a millionaire and still be sleeping alone.
You might be a millionaire and still be sleeping alone.
(source unknown)*

I'm convinced that Denver's going to be set up for a conversion before real long. Some of these songs he's singing is on the verge of seeing a futility of all of the crud that he's lived for all of his life and the inside rebellion that's going on against God. I think everything around him is beginning to become

meaningless, because he's achieved it.

Somebody that knows him well, [should] get on track and get ahold of the guy and say "Hey I've listened to your albums and I need to talk to you because I think I've got part of the answer to your problem." And go for it.

Now how does verse 9, 10 and 11 fit with verse 8?

See the guy's all alone in verse 8. What do you do when you're in isolation? I always called verses 9 and 10 the **SUSPENDER VERSES**.

v. 9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:

v.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!

v.11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?

When you are facing the seething resistance from God and you are pressed by people around you, how do you handle your problem?

I'll tell you how men do it. Men usually do it like a real high-breed animal. They run off and hide by themselves and lick

their wounds.

Thomas is a classic illustration of this.

Remember when Christ was crucified on the Cross and He makes His first revelation to the men that first Sunday night? There are two guys that aren't there. Judas has already committed suicide and Thomas is off in the [bushes] somewhere.

Why wasn't Thomas there? Thomas is a loyal melancholy in temperament. And that means, boy when it falls apart, you get alone and you cry a lot and you don't talk to anybody. You just try to take care of it by yourself. You retreat in isolation and suffer alone.

Now that's the normal thing to do. It's the hardest thing in the world for a man who is hurting to find help from somebody else. You are a unique individual as a part of the male species if, when you're hurting, you run to somebody else to seek comfort and have someone bear your load. That's what he's saying.

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work.”

Why do I go see somebody? I need companionship. I need comfort. I need consolation. I need counsel. I need to have someone say “Hey, I'm for you! I believe in you! I want to really help you!”

“If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!”

“Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?”

He’s saying marriage, collective bargaining, all of these things are God’s gifts to help us when the times get rough and we face oppression, competition—and we’re losing—and poverty and loneliness and injustice.

Jim Conway in his book *Men in Mid-Life Crisis* gives a homely illustration, but it’s a classic too, of what it means to have somebody always there to help you.

It’s a story of a farm couple. They had agreed when they were first married that whenever they had a problem they would signal the other so they’d get some help and some encouragement.

For instance, if things went really bad in the field and the tractor broke down and the cows went dry and everything went bum, he would come into the kitchen door and he would take his hat off and throw it on the table. She would take that as a signal that he needed some TLC—some tender loving care. And she would respond by using some of her strength to help him to go on.

Now, if the dishwasher overflowed. If the kids were ornery

than the dickens and she was on a down, she'd put her apron on backwards. So when he came in, if she had her apron on backwards, man that meant she needed some real love and encouragement because she's really down. She needs to be taken out to dinner or something.

Well you guessed it. One night he came in and threw his hat on the table and turned around and she had her apron on backwards.

The key to that, that they fell into one another's arms, cried a while, prayed about it and went on from there.
(source unknown)

You know that was the most beautiful thing to me about seeing Clark and Lori and Dr. George right after the death of little George. You don't say much when a guy's lost his eye and his practice and his mother has just been killed in a traffic accident and then two months later his little grandson—his only grandson—has gone to be with the Lord. So you pray. But as soon as I finished praying, all three of them led in prayer.

Just a magnificent time of all four of us experiencing encouragement that God was in this for some purpose unbeknownst to us.

Here they found their encouragement by ministering to one another. That's what Solomon's saying.

Verse 12 is the same thing.

v.12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

He says in one other place in the Proverbs, “there’s a safety in a multitude of counselors.” I don’t know where that verse is but that’s in essence what it is. “There is a safety in a multitude of counselors.” Reach out. (Prov. 11:14)

Now I had a hard time with verses 13-16. You know, I could see the oppression. I could see the competition. I could see the loneliness of a guy who’s working like crazy, is a workaholic, and he doesn’t have anybody to leave it to. I could feel that but I didn’t understand how verses 13-16—I thought Solomon slipped a cog here. And then I realized hey, you know, the job loss not only happens to the weak guys in the first of the chapter but even the big dogs lose their jobs too. And very quickly and very dramatically and that’s what’s described here in 13-16.

v.13 Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning.

v.14 The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom.

v.15 I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king's successor.

v.16 There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

I thought of that little statement of Bobby Richardson's testimony. You know the guy played second base for the New York Yankees. He gave his testimony. He says:

“They cheer like mad until you fall. And that's how long you last.”

I mean, you ride this crest of great public opinion. You are STARS until you fall and that's how long you last.

Until you fall, and that's how long you last.

This old king, he's been king for a long time and he thinks he's a hot dog. Maybe it sounds like the chairman of your corporation—unapproachable. Man, he's got it all and you better just sit up and listen because he's got the power and he's got the reigns and everything else. And pretty soon the people elect a young kid who will take his place because at least that young kid will listen to the desires of the people and will be taught by them.

And then he goes through the syndrome of being forgotten and

cast down. So he says it's all foolishness. They cheer like mad until you fall and that's how long you last.

Winston Churchill put it this way:

“We all want to learn but we all hate to be taught.”
(source unknown)

And he says:

The measure of a real leader is the following four characteristics:

1. Do you respond positively to criticism and reprimand?
 2. Do you seek the counsel of others with an open heart and attempt to make the necessary changes?
 3. Do you harbor resentments toward those who are seeking to help you?
 4. Do you feel that your heart is basically proud, aloof and independent?
- (source unknown)

What he's saying in this situation is the job loss happens to the poor little guy up here at the first of the chapter and even the big guys have to face it too, because that's the way life is.

Now how does religion fit into all this? That's the answer in the next 7 verses.

And this is how we're going to wrap it up. I want to make a

statement at the beginning of these verses and it might shock you just a tad. You probably thought you'd never hear a preacher say it:

Be careful about seeking God as a way out of your stress and your failure.

There are a lot of dramatic decisions and conversions that take place when somebody's having a rough time. Just be careful how quick you are to talk about it because too many times you're grasping at the last straw and you really don't know what you're talking about. And you're saying some things and you're making some promises maybe you shouldn't be making.

I think that's the feeling that comes out in these verses. I mean, what do you do when you're fighting against God and you're fighting against man and you're wrong with the world? There's no place to look but up and get that right! Right?

Ok, he's just giving you a warning in verse 1.

5:v. 1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.

He's starting to turn to religion. He says but be careful. Don't go over there and sign some pledge cards and make some commitments and get up and give some big fancy testimony and get baptized and catechized and simonized and do all that

jazz. Just take it a little bit easy here. Don't get in a big hurry, in a rush about this just because there's no place to look but up.

It's the Prodigal Son coming to his senses in the pig pen and saying "How many [servants] of my father have more than they can eat and I'm perishing here with hunger?"

In a crisis you come to your senses and realize you're out there in left field where you don't want to be.

The danger of it all is you're becoming what you don't want to be. And the face that you're looking at in the mirror is a stranger. And when everything falls apart, you begin to look up. Just don't make some weird decisions.

Someone said: "If you and God are at a distance, guess who moved."

And in the midst of the crisis, sometimes we wake up in those impossible circumstances, and that's what we're saying.

I think this sometimes happens in foxhole decisions. Maybe some of you are sitting here and you've gone through traumatic circumstances of war. And in that you made some real promises to God that you forgot.

You know, we do that all the time.

Bill Lawrence, the chairman of our board, had lunch with us

Tuesday after I was teaching this particular passage and he says “Man, did you ever eat my lunch. I was flying a B-29 on a bombing mission in World War II.” And he says “I saw flack busting all around me for the first time and I said a lot of things to God if he’d get me down out of here!” And he said “God did and I’ve forgotten a lot of those things that I said.”

What you’re saying, when it gets real rough don’t make these dramatic big empty vows and promises to God unless you intend to fulfill them. Because you’re not going to be blessed when you make all those promises and then you don’t fulfill it.

See what verse 2 [says]—doesn’t that just fit that?

v. 2 Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.

Alright, there are THREE WARNINGS there:

1. “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.”
2. “Don’t be quick with your mouth”—in other words, don’t say a lot of words that you don’t mean.
3. “do not be hasty in your heart”—in other words, don’t get all emotionally upset. Don’t respond with your heart and forget your head. And that you’re not going to be able to live up to what you say.

James 1:19

Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.

Be careful when you go up to God's house. Be careful when you get bitter at God because God sees it from a different perspective from you and He's working it all together for good. (Rom. 8:28)

You only see through a glass darkly but then face to face (1 Cor. 13:12).

Look at verse 3. I couldn't believe this was here either.

v. 3 As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.

What happens when you start facing the loneliness of trauma? And you and God are fighting and horizontally it's lousy? You start having dreams, don't you?

What do you dream about? You dream about what it would be like to be successful. You dream about what it might have been and you have illusions of grandeur. And in those dreams you're thinking why this? Why now? Why me? God, You are unjust in what You were doing.

One old guy, he was an anonymous friar from a monastery in

Nebraska, left behind a letter in his old age that is a classic. This guy evidently faced some tremendous pressures and he's dreaming and reflecting on how he would live life again the second time, if he got another shot at it. This is worth the price of today's study.

If I had my life to live over again, [here he is dreaming] I'd try to make more mistakes next time. I would relax, I would limber up. I would be sillier than I've been this trip. I know of very few things I would take seriously. I would take more trips. I would be crazier. I would climb more mountains, swim more rivers and watch more sunsets. I would do more walking and looking. I would eat more ice cream and less beans. I would have more actual troubles and fewer imaginary ones. You see, I'm one of those people who live life prophylactically and sensibly, hour after hour, day after day. Oh, I've had my moments. And if I had to do it all over again, I'd have more of them. In fact, I'd try to have nothing else, just moments. One after another, instead of living so many years ahead of each day. I've been one of those people who never go anywhere without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, a gargle, a raincoat, aspirin and a parachute. If I had to do it over again, I would go places, do things and travel lighter than I have. If I had my life to live over, I would start barefooted earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall. I would play hooky more. I wouldn't make such good grades except by accident. I would ride on more merry-go-rounds. I'd pick more daisies.

It is fairly safe to say that this old gentleman had a life filled with stress.

(source unknown)

You know, an old guy looking back says “If I could just live it, I’d sure loosen up a lot and I would really enjoy it.”

Verse 4.

v. 4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow.

“When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow.”

v. 5 It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it.

“It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it.”

v. 6 Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the [temple] messenger, “My vow was a mistake.” Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?

“Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the [temple] messenger, ‘My vow was a mistake.’ Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?”

**v. 7 Much dreaming and many words are meaningless.
Therefore stand in awe of God.**

In the midst of all of this struggle and difficulty, Solomon warns us when we turn to religion, when we turn to God, when we're seeking to find the answer, don't let the stress drive us into the house of God to make some commitments and some statements that we're not going to be able to live up to later.

I've been in this thing long enough to see an awful lot of these stars—so to speak—that everybody knows, make these dramatic, emotional decisions out of drug rehabilitation or alcoholics anonymous or something else, to find them only to disappear into the woodwork very shortly thereafter. They made a bunch of sparkling promises and they said a lot of stuff they really didn't mean. And I don't think they—well I know they never really experienced a real conversion or they'd still be hanging in there. They'd still be walking with God.

Solomon's just saying be slow about it. Be scrutinizing. Be sure of the steps you're taking and let the experience, as you begin to come out of it, and the vows that you make, be sure you do not delay in fulfilling everything that you say.

What lessons did I get out of this passage? Well I got a few.

Lesson #1: Oppression is a fact of life where there is competition.

Oppression is a fact of life where there is competition.

And of course, you live out there in that world, you can expect it. It's just part of it.

Oppression is a fact of life where there's a competition—always somebody that wants your job.

Lesson #2: God hears and comforts the oppressed.

God hears and comforts the oppressed.

Lesson #3: Two or three together are better than being alone.

Two or three together are better than being alone.

Do the unnatural thing. Reach out and touch somebody else when you're hurting. Seek to allow them to minister unto you.

Lesson #4: Accepting the counsel and advice of others is a wise path to follow.

Accepting the counsel and advice of others is a wise path to follow.

One of my children is a diabetic, quite severe diabetic. She was facing a very critical time of hospitalization and some other difficulties and my other four children, my wife and I, were visiting together as to what to do.

It is amazing what my two sons said. You know how you're "the word will never return unto you void but it shall accomplish that which you please." (Isa. 55:11)

I'm saying, we do not have the funds to put her in the hospital like she needs. And my youngest son said "But God's word says 'our God will supply all of our needs' and He has done that to this point."

And then my oldest son said "Yes, and there is safety in a multitude of counselors."

You know it's at times like that when you really realize that just saying a scripture verse, just sharing with your family the Word it will come back to prosper and to counsel you from their very lips at a time when you really need it.

Accepting the counsel and advice of others is a wise path to follow.

And then this fifth lesson, I know you're going to understand it in the context.

Lesson #5: Don't be overly zealous in your religious endeavor while you're under stress.

Don't be overly zealous in your religious endeavors while you're under stress.

Just don't make a lot of promises and a lot of vows until you get your head together and you understand what God's plan is for your life.

Don't be overly zealous in your religious endeavors while you're under stress.

Perhaps you're here tonight and you need to hear [these] words:

2 Corinthians 4:18

The things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal....

Can you look beyond this to that which is eternal?

I had a tragedy of a man who was dying of cancer and this is what he said:

If I loved a person and had the power to keep suffering out of his life, I sure would do it. But the God you say loves me hasn't done it in my case. Until I see some evidence of His kindness, I'll have nothing to do with Him.”

Why is he saying that? He's bitter because he can only see the

temporal. He can't look beyond to the eternal.

Paul says completely opposite. He says: "The outward man is perishing, passing away, but the inward man is being renewed on a daily basis." (2 Cor. 4:16)

This is just the way of man. This is just the process of life. We're going to fade away as a leaf. We're going to be like the dust. We're going to pass away.

But in the process of passing away, the spirit—the inner man—can be renewed on a regular basis.

Well Solomon's got some more things to say to us next week as he's trying to bring himself out of this mad maze of a mid-life crisis. He's on the way because at least he's gotten back to God tonight in this particular part of the episode.

This is almost like *The Days of Our Lives*, isn't it? I mean, you come for the next episode to see what he's going to do. See how he's going to solve it and you're not going to be disappointed when we get to the end of it when you see the solution to it.

The answer tonight is, if you're hurt, if you're having a rough time, have you surrendered to it? Have you said "Ok God, this is an opportunity for You to be glorified. I'm fighting it so I'm not a very good witness. I'm willing to surrender. Lord, I turn it over to you right now. I'm just going to let you have it. I'm going to let you work it out and I'm going to give You the glory for what You're going to do in these impossible

circumstances.”

Lord, Your word says “Call upon Me and I will show you great and mighty things which you know not.” Lord, we call tonight and we know before we can call, we’ve got to submit. We’ve got to say “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me. But nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done.” And You have said “Behold, I am the Lord God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for Me?” And the answer is of course not. We just pray now that our resistance, our rebellion, our resentment, might be turned into a total act of surrender and commitment. And allow You to do that which seemeth good to You in each of our lives. Knowing that You love us, You want to help us, You don’t want to hurt us. You want to bring about joy, abundant peace and satisfaction and fulfillment, so we turn ourselves over to you afresh, even as believers tonight. Perhaps if there’s someone here who’s still fighting the philosophies of the world and the thought of Christianity still is repulsive to them, that they turn to the altogether lovely One, Jesus Christ, who reaches out with scarred hands and a heart filled with love to offer the answer to their problems. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

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Study Number Four – Caught in the Corporate Squeeze: A Man Looks Up – Ecclesiastes 4:1-5:7

NOTES

v. 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.

v. 2 And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive.

v. 3 But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.

v. 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.

v. 5 The fool folds his hands and ruins himself.

v. 6 Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.

v. 7 Again I saw something meaningless under the sun:

v. 8 There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. "For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" This too is meaningless—a miserable business!

v. 9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:

v.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!

v.11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?

v.12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

v.13 Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning.

v.14 The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom.

v.15 I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king's successor.

v.16 There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

NOTES

5:v. 1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.

v. 2 Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.

v. 3 As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.

v. 4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow.

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v. 6 Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the [temple] messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?

v. 7 Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.

QUESTIONS:

1. Read Ecclesiastes 4:1-5:7 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. What is Solomon considering, according to verse 1?

3. What else did he see, according to verse 4?

4. What does Solomon speak about in verse 8?

5. What is the meaning of verses 9-12?

6. What is Solomon describing in verses 13-16?

7. What warnings does Solomon give in chapter 5:1-7?

8. Find and state his summary, according to verse 7.

9. Which verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Oppression of others is a fact of life where there is competition.

LESSON #2: God hears and comforts the oppressed.

LESSON #3: Two or three together are better than being alone.

LESSON #4: Accepting the counsel and advice of others is a wise path to follow.

LESSON #5: Do not be overly zealous in your religious endeavors while under stress.