

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES
 “THE MID-LIFE CRISIS”

STUDY NUMBER FOUR – Caught in the Corporate Squeeze – A Man Looks up
 4:1 – 5:7

TEXT:

- v. 1 Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw 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 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.
- 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 word 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.
- v. 5 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?
- v. 7 Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.

INTRODUCTION:

It was the enraptured Rutherford who could shout in the midst of serious and painful trials, “Praise God for the hammer, the file and the furnace.” The hammer is a useful but the nail, if it had feeling and intelligence, could present another side of the story. For the nail knows the hammer only as an opponent, a brutal, merciless enemy who lives to pound it into submission, to beat it down out of sight and clench it into place. That is the nail’s view of the hammer. And it is accurate except for one thing: the nail tends to forge that both it and the hammer are servants of the same workman. Let the nail but remember that the hammer is held by the workman and all resentment toward it will disappear. The carpenter decides whose head shall be beaten next, and what hammer shall be used in the beating. That is the sovereign right of the carpenter. When the nail has surrendered to the will of the workman and has gotten a little glimpse of his benign plans for its future, it will yield to the hammer without complaint.

The file is more painful still, for its business is to bite into the soft metal, scraping and eating away the edges until it has shaped the metal to its will. Yet the file has in truth no real will in the matter, but serves another master as the metal also does. It is the master and not the file that decides how much shall be eaten away, what shape the metal shall take, and how long the painful filing shall continue. Let the metal accept the will of the master and it will not try to dictate when or how it shall be filed.

As for the furnace, it is the worst of all. Ruthless and savage, it leaps at every combustible thing that enters it and never relaxes its fury until it has reduced it all to shapeless mass and ashes. All that refuses to be burned is melted to a mass of helpless matter, without will or purpose of its own. When everything is melted that will melt and all is burned that will burn, then, and not until then, the furnace calms down and rests from its destructive fury.

The Christian Medical Society Journal in the article “The Mid-Life: A Darkwood” says “Whatever else happens during these years, the mid-life syndrome develops as a spiritual crisis. For the first time, the middle aged lives life between sunrise and sunset. He numbers his years not in terms of birth but of death. Instead of marching forward from birthday to birthday, he looks at the number of years until death-day. In the middle years we are shaken by the reality that we are finite and mortal. Living between the two horizons, therefore, forces people to take stock of themselves. At this time two tragedies can happen: not getting what you want or getting it. A man who has been scampering to reach the top realizes he will never get there. He must settle for some place in the lowlands. The man who reaches the top begins to wonder if the view was worth the climb. If he has achieved his goals and doesn’t know what else to do, or if despite the prizes he has earned he still feels unfulfilled, success becomes a practical joke. What mattered most to him, now may not matter at all – and he faces a crisis of meaning.

Dobson in his book points out “The fourth and final enemy of a man in mid-life crisis appears to be God himself. Through a strange manipulation of logic man blames the Creator for all his troubles, approaching Him with rebellion and anger. In return, he feels condemned and abandoned and unloved by God. The consequence is a weakened faith and a crumbling system of beliefs. This explains more than any other factor the radical changes in behavior that often accompany the struggles of middle life.”

Leupold points out – “This chapter might be given the heading ‘Social Problems’ for the four illustrations used are taken from the area of social issues but not social issues as such are being discussed but primarily the fact that the social problems make the issue under discussion plainer, and that issue is the vanity of all purely earthly values.”

Thus far in our series of studies we have heard Solomon express his thesis back in chapter 1:2 – “Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” He has then set out to prove that with three observations in chapter 1 – 1) “What is the gain from my labor?” 2) “There is nothing new” and 3) “no one will remember us in the next generation.”

In study #2 Solomon explored the pursuit of pleasure, the taking of wine and the pouring of himself into work and projects, only to find the frustration of having to leave everything that he acquired to others who would certainly not appreciate it.

In episode #3 Solomon finds himself bumping up against God’s eternal purpose, no matter what he does or how hard he tries.

I have called this fourth chapter “Being Caught in the Corporate Squeeze.”

There are many in the business world who can certainly relate to the difficult problems of climbing the corporate ladder only to discover that when nearly to the top they lose their job to someone else who is younger, more gifted or more productive in certain ways.

The axe often falls without any explanation whatsoever.

The world’s attitude often is “Get all you can. Can all you get and poison all the rest.”

Philippians 2:3, 4 “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests but also for the interests of others.”

3 John 9 “I wrote something to the church but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.”

Psalms 138:6 “For though the Lord is exalted, yet He regards the lowly but the haughty He knows from afar.”

We have already observed that the man who becomes most vulnerable for the mid-life crisis is an individual who sees life from three wrong perspectives:

1. Selfishly rather than socially
2. Viewing life apart from God rather than controlled by Him
3. Life is bounded by the grave rather than having a destiny beyond it

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.

James 5:4 – 6 “Behold they pay of the laborers who mowed your fields and which has been withheld by you cries out against you and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and put to death the righteous man. He does not resist you.”

Psalm 37:12 – 15 “The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him for He sees his day is coming. The wicked has drawn the sword and bent their bow to cast down the afflicted and the needy, to slay those who are upright in conduct. Their sword will enter their own heart and their bows will be broken.”

Veldey points out, “Competition and envy are likewise oppressive. Even a foolish, lazy man seems to be better off. But better is it for a man to shun the rivalries and envies of the world and have good and rainment and therewith to be content. Instead of envy and miserliness, which brings loneliness, the Counselor recommends companionship. The setting is that of a journey with its perils from bad roads, chilly nights and robbers. And if two are better than one, three are better still. That is a great lesson on friendship and a Christian reading this would naturally think of the friendship with Jesus.”

Galatians 6:7 “God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.”

Psalm 37:23 – 25 “The steps of a man are established by the Lord and he delights in his way. When he falls, he shall not be hurled head-long because the Lord is the one who holds his hand. I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken nor his descendants begging bread.”

Many an employee has found himself in this frustrating position, shedding tears over the corporate power and the pain of job loss, security, retirement and just plain humiliation from all of the misunderstanding because of job loss.

Solomon says that in their tears with power on the side of the oppressors they have no comforter.

This is not true of the believer, however:

John 14:26, 27 “But the comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled nor let it be fearful.”

II Corinthians 1:3 – 5 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”

It was C. S. Lewis who said, “God whispers in our pleasures but shouts in our pain.”

“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.”

Proverbs 24:10 “If you are slack in the day of distress, you’re strength is limited.”
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.
Pain plants the flag of reality in the fortress of a rebel heart.

When you are looking at trials, heartbreaks, misunderstanding, selfishness and oppression from life under the sun, you naturally become bitter and resentful and rebellious in heart.

Looking at it from the divine perspective, James tells us in 1:2 -4 “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Those who limit their struggles with heartbreak and trial to life under the sun are those who have no comforter.

Andre Crouch in his song “Through It All” says it so well:

“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 that 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."

Job 23:10 – 13 "He knows the way I take: when he has tried me I shall come forth as gold. My foot has held fast to his path, I have kept his way and not turned aside. I have not departed from the command of his lips. I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. But he is unique, and who can turn him? And what his soul desires, that he does."

Bridges points out, "A sinful world is a world of selfishness. Men, instead of feeling themselves to be members of one great body, each bound to each other in mutual helpfulness, live only to seek their own, at whatever cost to their fellow creatures.

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

As is quite obvious from this second verse, Solomon is bitter and resentful about this oppression. And from the human perspective he sees the dead as being happier than the living, who are still alive and facing all of the oppression.

Romans 8:18 "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

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.

Solomon says better than the living who are oppressed or the dead who have already died are those who have never been born, so they have not seen all of the evil that is done under the sun.

The key phrases in verse 1 and verse 3 give us the clue for the perspective. It is "under the sun" that Solomon is speaking about in these first three verses.

When we look at our suffering strictly from the horizontal perspective, without any sovereign control or permission, it gives us these wrong conclusions.

Fenelon says, "He cuts away that which we are most reluctant to give up. And how it hurts! But we must remember that pain is only felt where there is life. And where there is life is just a place where death is needed."

It is a loving Father's hand that will not cause his child a needless tear. It is an intensely careful hand that never makes a mistake. It is a marvelously skillful hand that gets the most beautiful results from his pruning. We must remember that though it may hurt, it never will harm.

The other day a bird fancier put into a sunny window two young birds, a starling and a canary, in separate cages, side by side. The cages were identical, the sunshine came equally on the two. At once the starling began beating against the sides of his cage. He kept this up continuously and refused his food and drink. A cry of rebellious frenzy emerged all day from his cage. The canary seemed to eye with quiet wisdom his surroundings. He ate and drank and, mounting to the topmost perch, he swelled his tiny throat with his first effort at song. When the fancier came at evening to put the birds away for the night, he found the starling, a brilliant but battered and blood-stained mass of plumage fluttering helplessly in the bottom of the cage. But the canary was still swinging and singing and had triumphed over his bars.

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.

First, he saw the oppression that was taking place, the tears of the oppressed and the power of those who were oppressing. Now he looks again here in verse 4 a second time. And he sees this time that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. He then makes a summary statement that this too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Oswald Chambers put it this way, "The grasping crushing of someone in order to get gain. Do it kindly or brutally, but the basis of success must be the crushing of something or someone. There is a rivalry between men and we have made the rivalry a good thing. We have made ambition and competition the very essence of civilized life. No wonder we have no room for Jesus Christ and no room for the Bible. We are all so appallingly orthodox nowadays, so scientific and materialistic and so certain that rationalism is the basis of things that we make out the Bible to be the most revolutionary, unorthodox and heretical of books. Jesus Christ echoes Solomon's attitude, for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses."

Again, we are reminded that this perspective is from under the sun because Jesus said in John 9:4 "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day, for the night is coming when no man can work."

The apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:12 – 14 "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Alexander Whyte in his Bible Characters says, “No man from that day to this has ever admitted envy. To every other wickedness confession has often been made but did you ever confess envy? Or did you ever have envy confess to you? No, never.

“Only by the stone, only by the dagger, only by the pistol, only by the cup, only by the smitten back and the slandered name is envy ever found out.

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

We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as unsolvable problems. The fool just folds his hands and makes no progress in trying to capitalize upon his opportunities.

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

Isaiah 26:3 “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee because he trusteth in thee.”

Isaiah 32:17 “And the work of righteousness shall be peace and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever.”

Fenelon points out, “Live 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.”

Satan is the one who torments us with trivialities and he often transforms himself into an angel of light and bothers us with endless self-examinations and an over-sensitive conscience which allows us no peace.

Learn to cultivate peace. And you can do this by learning to turn a deaf ear to your own ambitious thoughts, or haven't you yet learned that the strivings of the human mind not only impair the health of your body but also bring dryness to the soul. You can actually consume yourself by too much inner striving. And to no purpose at all. Your peace and inner sweetness can be destroyed by a restless mind.

Phillip Keller in his book A Gardener Looks at the Fruits of the Spirit says “Peace is the selfless, self-giving, self-losing, self-forgetting, self-sacrificing love of God in repose, despite all the adverse reverses of life. It is love standing serene, strong and stable in spite of every insult, every antagonism, every hate. Peace is the spirit and soul of persons so imbued with the presence of God's gracious spirit that they are not easily provoked. They are not touchy. They are not irritable or easily enraged. Their pride is not readily pricked. They do not live like a bristling porcupine with all its quills extended in agitated self-defense. Peace is actually the exact opposite. It is the quiet, potent, gracious attitude of serenity and good will that comes to meet the onslaught of others with good cheer, equanimity and strong repose. To see and understand this quality of life at its best we simply must turn away from our contemporaries and look at Christ, God, very God.”

Bridges points out “Another picture of vanity. The wise man looks from one scene to another. Oppression, envy, now idleness. What a vast fertility of excuses does the great enemy suggest. In the business of daily life how many stumbling blocks does he put in the way. The sluggard wasting his precious time and opportunity, mistaking idleness for quietness, heaping misery upon himself, bears the stamp of a fool. And well does he deserve his name. He folds his hands together. With heartless indifference, as if he would rather eat his very flesh from his bones than put forth any troublesome exertion. And yet, an excuse was ready at hand. Above him he saw the tyranny of the oppressor. Many on his own level grudged their neighbor his happiness and therefore, for himself, he deems a little with ease to be far better than much with toil and trouble. Nothing is to be gained without travail. And yet the fruit of successful travail becomes the object of envy. Far better, therefore, he thinks a handful with quietness than both hands filled with the heavy tax of vexation of spirit.”

V. 7 Again I saw something meaningless under the sun.

Now Solomon is going to look and not only see oppression and envy but he also is going to see something else.

v. 8 There was 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!

Here is a workaholic who is all alone. He has no family, a son or brother to be his heir. And yet, his eyes are not content with his wealth. He is caught up in the success syndrome of never having enough to satisfy. And then he asks himself two questions:

1. For whom am I toiling? – In other words, who is going to be receiving the fruit of my labor?
2. Why am I depriving myself of enjoyment? This too is meaningless – a miserable business.

In this situation it is you against the system, all by yourself.

Oswald Chambers points out, “There is such a thing as an obsession of solitariness. Hermits, aesthetes, and celibates cut themselves off in revolt. Because I cannot get peace or joy or happiness in the tyranny of civilized life or in commerce and I cannot be an idling tramp, then I will become a solitary, live a sequestered life.

“Solomon points out what has been proved in history that such an experiment ends disastrously because a man cannot shut out what is inside by cutting himself off from the outside. Jesus Christ was not a solitary man. The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, ‘Behold, a man gluttonous and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.’ John the Baptist came a solitary man and they said, ‘He hath a devil.’ O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest. That is the desire to be solitary. If only I could get away and be quiet. If I could only live in a sunrise or a sunset. We have to find our true life in things as they are with that on the inside which

keeps us right. The true energy of life is in being rightly related to God and there only is true joy found.”

Robert D. Foster points out “How many men I know need a handful of quietness in the midst of the marketplace and work a day world. A dash of peace, but you must experience it to know it. Quietness, you must practice it to feel and enjoy it. A Calm spirit and stillness of soul is like a lotion of the bee bite. It takes away the irritation and crisis complaining, although the puncture remains. The climate of our day has been expressed: ‘When everything that is fastened down is coming loose.’ In such an hour of inner emptiness and purposelessness have you learned the secret of disengaging yourself from the hustle and bustle in order to quietly meditate and reflect. A handful of quietness is found by getting up a little extra early in the morning for some good old-fashioned quiet time with God. There in a place of withdrawal bring a quiet heart. How few of us know the power of stillness, quietness and waiting upon our Savior to make himself known to us in the holy hush of prayer. He who rushes from his bed to his business and waiteth not to worship in prayer and adoration is as foolish as though he had not put on his clothes or washed his face. And as unwise as though he dashed into battle without arms or armor. Be it ours to bathe in the safely flowing river of communion with God before the heat of the wilderness and the burden of the day begins to oppress.”

Whereas back in verse 5 the fool folds his hands and is not willing to do anything to protect himself, he will not work for himself. He is somebody who wants everything given to him. So here we have a man who is depriving himself of everything in order that he might acquire more wealth.

Finayson says, “A man may, through the selfish love of ease, resolve to keep out of the whirl and bustle of life and may fold his hands in indolence. Such a man is a fool. His policy is suicidal. Idleness cannot give real happiness and it may even lead to ruin. It wrecks a man’s character and it may wreck his fortunes also. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, so shall thy poverty come as one that travelth, and thy want as an armed man.”

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?

Here Solomon is giving up illustrations of why there is a need to be in this together rather than all alone like the man pictured in verse 8.

Hubbard points out, “From the institution of marriage to the practice of collective bargaining generations of people have tested the truth of these words. One of God’s

great gifts in helping us deal with problems of oppression, poverty, loneliness and injustice is the company of others.”

Jim Conway in his book Men in Mid-Life Crisis tells the story: “There is an old story about a farm couple who learned how to signal each other when they needed some encouragement. If the man needed some TLC (tender loving care), he would walk into the kitchen and toss his hat on the table. This was a signal to his wife that she needed to encourage and strengthen him. If the husband came in from the field and saw his wife wearing her apron backwards, this was a sign that he needed to bear some of her burdens. You guessed it! One day he walked in from the field and threw his hat on the table and she had her apron on backwards! When a couple has been practicing encouraging and supporting one another, even when they both need help at the same time, they can. In the midst of their need, put their arms around each other and cry together, each receiving strength from the other.”

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

DeHaan points out, “The third example is probably a continuation of the second. Solomon says that a man who journeyed alone was far more likely to be robbed than one who had a companion. In fact, the Preacher implies that the larger the company, the greater the degree of safety, for he quotes this well-known proverb of his day: ‘A three-fold cord is not quickly broken.’ This is similar to our current saying, ‘In unity there is strength.’ Everyone is aware that three strands woven together are more than three times as strong as a single one. Similarly, human experience shows that a group of people working together are far more effective than the same number when each goes his separate way. These simple illustrations from Solomon’s day, which show the advantage of associating with others, are supported by the general teaching of the entire Bible. The scriptures tell us that man’s most significant relationships besides that with God are with the family, society and the church.

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.

Solomon started the chapter with his concern about oppression and then he concludes the chapter with the illustration of a power struggle between a wise youth and a foolish king.

Leupold points out, “A poor youth takes over the kingdom of an old king who once did well but has now grown too old. But even this poor youth will, in like manner, see the day come when his own popularity wanes. The king is merely the representative of those who have attained to a high position. What is recorded is a common observation with reference to those who have held a prominent position for some length of time. Theirs will usually be a downfall that is all the harder and the more disappointing because the longer they held such a position the more do they cherish it and make it the goal of all their aspirations and tenaciously cling to it, even after the period of their usefulness has come to an end. What usually happens is what is recorded. The king, having become old, grows self-sufficient and refuses counsel. He no longer knows enough to accept advice. At one time this poor erring mortal was ready to accept counsel. Self-sufficiency is a grievous fault that will most likely be found in those who are growing old. He that cannot accept correction is one who has outlived his usefulness and a wise youth, even though he is poor, is certainly to be preferred.

Robert Foster points out, “The foolish king, he has lowered the throne beneath the high chair. The very quality that got him to the top has departed. Well can it be said of him, ‘He gives admonition by the bucketful but accepts it by the grain.’ King Rehoboam is a good illustration. In I Kings 12:6 – 8 –

“And King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, How do you counsel me to answer this people? Then they spoke to him saying, If you will be a servant to this people today, will serve them, grant them their petition and speak good words to them. Then they will be your servants forever. But he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him.”

He had the hearts of his people in the palm of his hand but lost it all by the rejection of admonition. He split the kingdom through the refusal to take wise warning. Smartness, clever strategy and youthful politicking was more important to Rehoboam than friendly, earnest advice of the older men. Winston Churchill must have had this foolish leader in mind when he said, ‘We all want to learn but we all hate to be taught.’ The measure of you as a leader might be defined as you answer some of these following questions:

1. Do you respond positively to criticism and reprimands?
2. Do you seek out the counsel of others and then, with an open heart, 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?

An admonition is likened unto a red light. It is a warning of danger ahead. It is a caution to proceed ever so carefully. It is counsel that a wise leader will follow fully.”

Every man who aspires to top performance must be willing to accept suggestions for constructive change. From the cradle to the grave an open heart to gentle reproof is an absolute. Mature leadership that rejects admonition is to be pitied. All the years of experience, all organizational skills, all sharp managerial acumen, all these are cancelled

out by bull-headed refusal of sage and wise counsel. 'Except ye become as little children who are teachable, malleable, and humble in heart,' Children are not usually bound by tradition, impressed by their own importance, nor victims of ceremony, ritual and calloused independence.

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.

McGee points out, "Solomon tried being religious. He went up to the temple but he warns, 'Have as little to do with it as possible. Keep your mouth shut. Go and sit but for goodness sakes don't commit yourself to anything. Be not rash with your mouth and let not your heart be hasty to utter anything before God. For God is in heaven and you are upon earth. Therefore, let your words be few.' He is warning, Do not make any decision under the stress of emotion. Cry at the movies but don't do it in church. Don't sign a pledge. If you are going to rent an apartment or a house, it's all right to sign for that. But don't commit yourself to God in writing. In other words, make it a religion. Go through the form but avoid the reality. My friend Solomon is not the only one who tried that. There are a lot of unhappy people in our churches today. They never get involved. They just go through a nice sweet little ritual. There is nothing as deadening as that."

Finlayson points out, "The chief lesson, however, now before us is the grand lesson of reverence toward the most High. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Reverence lies at the root of all true religion. God is a spirit and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth. Worship without heart-felt reverence for the name and the will of God degenerates into mere formalism. And formalism may develop into hypocrisy and even into profanity. We know how Christ denounced the formalism of the Pharisees."

Leupold points out, "The connection of thought with what precedes seems to be this, Having demonstrated quite fully that all things are vain, the Preacher feels the desirability of warning his readers, lest being set in the midst of so much vanity, they themselves become vain. He warns them to watch that area of life where such vanity is most likely to gain entrance; namely, the area of worship.

MacDonald points out, "Man is instinctively religious but that is not necessarily good. In fact, it may be positively bad. His very religiosity may hide from him his need of salvation as a free gift of God's grace. In addition, man's own religion may be nothing more than a charade, an outward show, without inward reality. Vanity may seep into religious life just as much as in any other sphere, maybe even more so. So in chapter 5 Solomon lays down some advice to guard against informalism and externalism in dealing with the Creator."

So many times it is oppression and impossible circumstances that drive us into the presence of the Lord. Solomon has just been speaking about the meaninglessness of life and oppression that brings tears. He has been speaking about the loneliness of one against the rest of the world. It is many times in impossible, overwhelming circumstances that a man is driven into the arms of God.

Swindoll in his book Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back says, “Ah, Lord God, behold thou has made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by thine outstretched arm. Nothing is too difficult for thee.” (Jeremiah 32:17) Nothing is too difficult for thee. Do you realize that whatever thing or things you are calling impossibilities could be superimposed over what God says is nothing to Him. It is difficult to reconstruct in the English language the full color and impact of the Hebrew words used in this verse. The best we can do is to say: ‘No, absolutely nothing for you is extraordinary or surpassing.’ The text begins with the strongest negative known to the Hebrew language. ‘No, nothing, absolutely nothing for you Lord is extraordinary. What a statement to ponder. Jeremiah 32:27 says, ‘Behold, I am the Lord the God of all flesh. Is anything too difficult for me?’ Look at the last part of that verse a second time, ‘Is anything too difficult for me?’

God is asking you to substitute your impossibilities for the word ‘anything.’ You fill in the blank: ‘Is _____ too difficult for me?’ The implied answer, of course, is ‘absolutely not.’ Nothing is too difficult for me. You may be sitting there thinking, Yeah, that may be true for Christians who have a lot of past miracles in their repertoire but you don’t know my situation.”

Solomon warns that we are to guard our steps when we go to the house of God. We are to 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. Dog is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.

There are three warnings in these first two verses:

1. Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.
2. Do not be quick with your mouth.
3. Do not be hasty in your hearts.

James 1:19 “This you know, my beloved brethren, but let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.

Solomon is saying, Be careful when you go into the house of God. Don’t under some emotional stress be quick with your mouth to speak words that you do not mean and do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God in the midst of circumstances and events that you do not understand.

God is in heaven and He sees it from His perspective. You are on earth so let your words be few.

Romans 8:28 “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purposes.”

I Corinthians 13:12 “For now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face. Now I know in part but then I shall know fully, just as I also have been fully known.

Paul Little in his book Know Why You Believe says, “Perhaps the greatest difficulty for faith is to believe that God is good. There is so much which taken in isolation suggests the contrary. Helmut Thielecke of Hamburg points out that ‘A fabric viewed through a magnifying glass is clear in the middle and blurred at the edges. But we know the edges are clear because of what we see in the middle.’ ‘Life,’ he says, ‘is like a fabric. There are many edges which are blurred.’ Many events and circumstances we do not understand but they are to be interpreted by the clarity we see in the center – the cross of Christ. We are not left to guess about the goodness of God from isolated bits of data. God has clearly revealed his character and dramatically demonstrated it to us in the cross. He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? God never asks us to understand. We need only trust him in the same way we ask that our child only trust our love, though he may not understand or appreciate our taking him to the doctor. Peace comes when we realize we are able to see only a few threads in the great tapestry of life and God’s will and that we do not have the full picture. Then we can affirm with calm relief and joy that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. At times it is our reaction to suffering rather than the suffering itself that determines whether the experience is one of blessing or of blight. The sun melts the butter and hardens the clay. When, with God’s help, we can view all of life through the lens of faith in God’s love, we can affirm with Habakkuk the prophet, ‘Thou the fig tree does not blossom nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation.’”

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

The picture here in verse 3 is the picture of someone under the stressful circumstances of oppression, loneliness and the futility of facing a power struggle. In all of these hurtful and stressful circumstances, one begins to dream of what it would be like to be free from all of these.

The second response is words of bitterness and resentment, speaking of the injustice of God, asking questions, Why this? Why not? Why me?

Psalm 139:7 – 9 “Where can I go from thy spirit? Or where can I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there thy hand will lead me and thy right hand will lay hold of me.”

Swindoll tells the story of an anonymous friar in a Nebraska monastery. He wrote in a letter late in his life the following testimony: ‘If I had my life to live over again, 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 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 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 hokey 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 has had his fill of stress. He realized that to break its spell one must break the mold of a rat race lifestyle. May his tribe increase."

v.4 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.

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.

A song by Dick Anthony entitled "Will You Keep That Vow?" beautifully expresses this admonition:

"Many years ago, in a time of woe
To the Savior a promise you gave
If He just would show you the way to go
You'd receive Him, your soul to save.

In a time of pain, when all hope seemed vain
You remember your promise to God
With your life sustained and your health regained
You would serve Him at home or
abroad.

Will you keep that vow to the Savior now? The old promise that was broken somehow
So before Him bow and His will allow Will you keep, will you keep that vow?"

Many times it's when we have become the victims of oppression and of loneliness and a power struggle and have failed or lost that we turn our hearts toward God. First, we speak words of bitterness and resentment. And we have been reminded of the danger of that.

The next temptation that we face is the temptation of making a vow to God that if He will get us out of these circumstances and give us a job or solve the problems that we are facing, we then will serve Him with the rest of our lives.

Here Solomon warns against this kind of approach toward God.

Verse 7 warns us about the fact that much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.

The much dreaming that takes place back in verse 3 – “As a dream comes where there are many cares” and here in verse 7 “much dreaming” – these fantasies are for two purposes:

1. What might have been.
2. What could be in the future.

When we come to God out of the problems of verse 4, the opening warnings are very important in chapter 5: “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God.” Don’t, under stressful circumstances, make a big decision or a lot of promises. Don’t come and be bitter and resentful toward God either because He is in heaven and you are upon earth, so let your words be few. We then had the final warning about the vow: “Do not delay in fulfilling it.”

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons that 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: Don’t be overly zealous in your religious endeavors while under stress.