

# Relationships, Religion, Politics, and Money

*Ecclesiastes 4:7-5:20*

## BIBLE PASSAGE

[Ecc 4:7-16 NKJV] [7] Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun: [8] There is one alone, without companion: He has neither son nor brother. Yet there is no end to all his labors, Nor is his eye satisfied with riches. But he never asks, "For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?" This also is vanity and a grave misfortune. [9] Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. [10] For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. [11] Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? [12] Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken. [13] Better a poor and wise youth Than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more. [14] For he comes out of prison to be king, Although he was born poor in his kingdom. [15] I saw all the living who walk under the sun; They were with the second youth who stands in his place. [16] There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king; Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind. [Ecc 5:1-20 NKJV] [1] Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. [2] Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few. [3] For a dream comes through much activity, And a fool's voice is known by his many words. [4] When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed-- [5] Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. [6] Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? [7] For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God. [8] If you see the

oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them. [9] Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field. [10] He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity. [11] When goods increase, They increase who eat them; So what profit have the owners Except to see them with their eyes? [12] The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep. [13] There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt. [14] But those riches perish through misfortune; When he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand. [15] As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, To go as he came; And he shall take nothing from his labor Which he may carry away in his hand. [16] And this also is a severe evil--Just exactly as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he who has labored for the wind? [17] All his days he also eats in darkness, And he has much sorrow and sickness and anger. [18] Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. [19] As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor--this is the gift of God. [20] For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.

## ILLUSTRATION

Have you ever gotten a fortune cookie [image]? There's always some goofy positive statement that is supposed to make you feel better about yourself.

- "Your ingenuity and imagination will get great results."
- "The limit to your abilities is where you place it."
- "Your breakthrough success is just one step around the next corner."

Unfortunately, these sound like some preachers on TV today, but that's another story.

My dad and uncle are creative jokesters and once had the idea that someone should write misfortune cookies:

- **"Don't worry, you didn't like that job anyway."**
- **"Have you considered buying a burial plot for your dog lately?"**
- **"It's alright; we all knew the money would run out eventually."**

Well, no one could have written them better than King Solomon. The book of Ecclesiastes is like one big misfortune cookie. But it's sobering because, despite its depressive tone, it sheds some realities on life "under the sun" or without God that every human should grapple with. Because of sin in the world and in us, life has become an endless pursuit of

11:09



about eternity, God, and the meaning of life. Ecclesiastes provides all the answers to these questions.

Well, Solomon has put life to the test. He uses all the wisdom God has given him to find life's meaning. So far, he has quite the checklist:

- Pleasure - check
- Knowledge - check
- Success - check
- Possessions - check
- Power - check

In spite of attaining all these things, he still finds it pointless because there are unavoidable injustices in life and the world:

- Death - check
- Oppression - check
- Injustice - check
- Emptiness - check

In Chapter 5&6 he adds a few more things to the checklist:

1. Relationships
2. Religion
3. Politics
4. Money

First, Solomon discusses how relationships can positively impact our lives, yet they are often underutilized and taken for granted.

# 1 Relationships

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## BIBLE PASSAGE

**Ecc 4:7 NKJV - Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun:**

**Ecc 4:8 NKJV - There is one alone, without companion: He has neither son nor brother. Yet there is no end to all his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches. But he never asks, "For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?" This also is vanity and a grave misfortune.**

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## APPLICATION

Solomon describes the Ebenezer Scrooges out there.

- He overworks himself his entire life to fill his storehouses with more riches.
- He has no one to share it with, no one to enjoy it with, he won't even spend it on himself and enjoy it every once in a while, and he never once stops and asks himself the question, "Why?"

Solomon sees this as a grave misfortune! And I agree. In fact if that's you and you need someone to share all your money with, see me after church (j/k)!

Solomon next observes the great benefit of relationships in life. He would say that the only thing worse than living a pointless existence than dying is to do it alone.

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## BIBLE PASSAGE

**Ecc 4:9 NKJV - Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor.**

**Ecc 4:10 NKJV - For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. (no, this wasn't an infomercial for life alert)**

**Ecc 4:11 NKJV - Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone?**

**Ecc 4:12 NKJV - Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.**

## APPLICATION

There is a real value that comes with living life in a community with others:

- **9 - Greater productivity**
- **10 – Stronger Support**
- **11 – Mutual Benefit**
- **12 - Greater security**

It's valuable to make relationship investment a huge priority in our lives. As one pastor put it:

***“If you're too busy for people, you're too busy.”***

Verse 12, he ends by stating that a **threefold chord [image]** is not easily broken:

- In short, the more, the merrier. Yes, two is clearly better than one, but when it comes to strength in numbers, three is better than two.
- But there is a great application here for the Christian. I believe the third chord that can hold and strengthen every relationship is Jesus. When you bring Jesus into the center of a marriage or friendship, He holds it together and strengthens it against attack.
- But in our pride, we often try and go it alone. My friend, you cannot withstand the enemy's relentless attacks alone:
  - In temptation, you need safe accountability.
  - In sadness and weakness, you need support and encouragement.
  - When there is great work to be done that surpasses your capacity, you need fellow laborers.
  - Most importantly, every person needs Jesus to be the chord that fortifies the bond.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

Solomon ends the chapter speaking about the injustice of success. He tells a rags-to-riches story that has a sad ending:

**Ecc 4:13 NKJV - Better a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more.**

**Ecc 4:14 NKJV: For he comes out of prison to be king, although he was born poor in his kingdom.**

**Ecc 4:15 NKJV - I saw all the living who walk under the sun; they were with the second youth who stands in his place.**

**Ecc 4:16 NKJV - There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king; Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind.**

## 2 Religion

### APPLICATION

**Secondly, he adds religion to the ticket.**

- Solomon turns from hedonism and tries to religious fervor. He builds the temple with an untold fortune. He makes sacrifices and vows to God.
- In all his religious activity, he began to notice how it produced a sense of pride within himself because of all that He was doing for God.

This is ultimately what all man-made religion produces. While human religion might acknowledge God, it builds the wrong emphasis on what really matters to God. Human

religion generally emphasizes and glorifies what man can do to earn God's favor. It emphasizes the work that we can do for God, but true relationship emphasizes the work that God has done for us.

We could say it like this:

***Man-made religion revolves around our works. True religion revolves around our response to Christ's work.***

- The religious system that Jesus always had (and still has) a problem with is the man-made system that produces self-righteousness, religious pride, and moral superiority based on human traditions that supersede the grace of God and the truth of His Word.

**[Phi 3:3 NKJV] [3] For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,**

People try to find meaning in life through this kind of religion. They like to feel as though they did something to be good enough for God.

- ***I went to church three times this week***
- ***I was baptized into such and such a church***
- ***I memorized and said 12 prayers today***
- ***I followed all the rules that the church created and even more.***

When all is said and done, a person comes out of their religious experience proud of themselves rather than in awe of God. They have completed all the things on their human checklist and walk around as though they are better and more righteous than all those other sinful people out there.

***I like what Pascal said, "We can only know God well when we know our own sin. And those who have known God without knowing their wretchedness have not glorified Him but have glorified themselves." - Blaise Pascal***

**In Chapter 5, he observes someone going to the temple of God to offer sacrifices and perform their religious duties.**

Verses 1-7 are divided into 3 sections:

- **Preparing for worship-** Consider
- **Practicing Worship** - do more listening than talking
- **Post Worship** - take the vows you made while you were there seriously

In other words, when you worship God, consider your thoughts, consider your words, and consider your promises.

Solomon warns all who would play games with God through religion. He reminds humanity about the seriousness of dealing with God. He lays out some principles that, even from an “under the Sun” perspective, provide wisdom in how one should approach the living God.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

**[Ecc 5:1-7 NKJV] 1 Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. 2 Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God [is] in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few. 3 For a dream comes through much activity, And a fool's voice is known by his many words. 4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed-- 5 Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. 6 Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.**

## ILLUSTRATION

When you're younger (and sometimes when you're older), you have to be warned, "I think your eyes might be bigger than your stomach." You end up dishing out more than you can chew.

Apparently, many people, by going through religious motions, do the same thing with God. Solomon deals with several warnings regarding how one should approach God.

## A. LISTENING OVER SPEAKING



There are many religious people who don't seem to understand that God is less concerned about how many Christian platitudes and prayers our mouths can utter and more concerned with how much of His truth our hearts and minds can receive.

- This is not a prescription that we shouldn't pray, worship, or talk to God and each other when we come to church. However, it is a reminder that we need to put ourselves in the right perspective when approaching God.
- Here, Solomon uses language that deals with speech, words, and promises that are often quickly uttered in relation to God, but no one is thinking about the words they are saying or who they are saying them to.
- When we take a moment to soberly recognize that God is in heaven and I'm on earth... that is, there is a great divide between our natures. **It would be foolish for me to walk into a mechanic's shop or a doctor's office and start instructing them about how to use tools and instruments that I've never seen before on things I have no experience with. But then we approach God like we really know something about God, and you ought to listen to my plan.**
- James tells us that everyone should be slow to speak, quick to listen, and slow to anger. This applies to God as well.

A fool is known by his many words: It's been said that the tongue is the only member of our body that God created with its own cage for a reason.

- I think this is one place man-made religion can get it wrong. It emphasizes often useless words: Say this many prayers this many times and then repeat yourself. Go to the altar and make all kinds of promises to God that you haven't really thought about keeping. Just repeat the liturgy, sing the songs, and who cares if your heart and mind are actually engaged? Just fulfill the religious motions.

Rather, we ought to approach God's presence, be it in times of prayer, in reading the scripture, in going to church to corporately worship, with a sense of humility, reverence, and expectation to hear from God rather than to run through our religious exercises.

## B. INTENTIONALITY OVER RASHNESS

**2 Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.**

**7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.**

Human emotions often get the best of well-intentioned people. Here, Solomon is not discouraging communication with God, making vows to God, or uttering something, either with your heart or your mouth, in the presence of God when you haven't counted the costs or become resolved to follow through.

- Hey, I'm a dreamer. I've learned the hard way that with dreamers, there are a lot of "What if we could..." and "We should just go here, o this, buy that..." I've also learned how much better patience and intentionality are regarding the promises and plans I make.

### C. INTEGRITY OVER EXCUSES

**4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed-- 5 Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. 6 Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands?**

If someone was to go into the temple and make a commitment to give a certain gift, offering or tithe, the priest would go to collect it from them. By the time the temple servant would go to collect it, the person who made the commitment thought a little more about what they did and would make an excuse, "It was a misunderstanding... I know I felt compelled to make that commitment to the mission fund, but then I thought a little more about my budget. I know I jumped into signing up to serve in kid's ministry, but man, I just didn't really think about how busy my schedule is for work."

Listen, we all have made rash, emotional decisions. We've all broken commitments that we didn't think through, but our goal is that happens less and less because we fear God.

### QUOTE

**“God does not demand that we make promises to Him that we can't or won't keep. He values a contemplated commitment over an emotional response.”**

## 3 Politics

### BIBLE PASSAGE

**Ecc 5:8 NKJV - If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them.**

**Ecc 5:9 NKJV - Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field.**

### APPLICATION

You see, for many people in power, justice is only served when their wallets and agendas are served as well.

- Do not marvel - we shouldn't be shocked and in disbelief when a human-run government does fallen human things.
- We shouldn't be surprised when we see humans perverting justice and oppressing others, because everyone is working their own angle to move one step higher on the ladder of power.
- Even the king has an agenda in what happens in the farmer's field because he, too, is dependent on the food it produces.
- Yes, we can be angered, we can be moved to action, we can be disappointed, but don't be naive to think that everything can be trusted because "the government said so." The government is made up of humans, who with less accountability, will end up manipulating the general population to maintain their control, power, and wealth.

This is why we advocate for the godly to rule. Those who fear God have an objective truth and a greater power they are accountable to. Yes, the best of men are still men at best, but if we have the choice between electing rulers who fear God and those who have no regard for God, the choice is clear.

#### QUOTE

**“ God created government to bless people; man created politics to control people.**

Pastor Josh

#### BIBLE PASSAGE

**[Pro 29:2 NKJV] [2] When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; But when a wicked man rules, the people groan.**

## 4 Money

#### APPLICATION

Speaking of religion and politics, why not through in money since it seems to have its roots in both sectors.

The remainder of chapter 5 deals with Solomon's perspective on the pursuit of wealth and work. Solomon's perspective on wealth is interesting.

- Throughout this book, Solomon speaks of wealth as a fleeting pursuit. He sees the misery and toil it brings on people, yet he recognizes that wealth can be a source of

great enjoyment and pleasure. Ultimately, it will never purchase you what really matters in life.

- 20th century American comedian Groucho Marx said,

#### QUOTE

**“While money can't buy happiness, it certainly lets you choose your own form of misery.”**

Groucho Marx

#### APPLICATION

Solomon would agree!

In the remaining verses, he points out three things concerning wealth:

- *The deception of wealth*
- *The disappointment of wealth*
- *The dangers of wealth*

#### BIBLE PASSAGE

**Ecc 5:10 NKJV - He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.**

#### APPLICATION

**EXAMPLE:** Parents, tell me what happens to your child after you give them their first drink of coke, first piece of candy or first birthday cake. THEY WANT MORE, AND THEY WANT IT

ALL THE TIME.

This is the same with people who love riches. There is always another account to open, investment to make, house to buy, upgrade to make... it never ends, and the more that is attained, the greater the desire to have more done.

*Solomon's yearly income was 666 talents of gold, which in today's measurements and gold value comes to about 1.2 billion dollars a year. He even recognized that no matter what he had, there was always more that he wanted.*

*When John D. Rockefeller was asked, "How much money is enough?" He responded, "Just a little bit more."*

Making money and having money is never a sin in the bible, but for money not to become an idol you must maintain a proper perspective on it. If you're going to make it, and save it, and spend it, make sure you also give it. Remember, it doesn't really belong to you in the first place. This balance is key.

***As Anne Frank said, "No one has ever become poor by giving."***

#### BIBLE PASSAGE

**Ecc 5:11 NKJV - When goods increase, they increase who eat them; So what profit have the owners except to see them with their eyes?**

**Ecc 5:12 NKJV - The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.**

#### APPLICATION

Have you noticed this? The more stuff you have, the more stuff you need to maintain the stuff you have! In the end you can't sleep at night because you can't stop mulling over how you're going to maintain what you have and attain more!

**BIBLE PASSAGE**

[1Ti 6:8-10 NKJV] [8] And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. [9] But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. [10] For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

**BIBLE PASSAGE**

**Ecc 5:13 NKJV** - There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt.

**Ecc 5:14 NKJV** - But those riches perish through misfortune; When he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand.

**Ecc 5:15 NKJV** - As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came; And he shall take nothing from his labor Which he may carry away in his hand.

**Ecc 5:16 NKJV** - And this also is a severe evil--Just exactly as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he who has labored for the wind?

**Ecc 5:17 NKJV** - All his days he also eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and sickness and anger.

**Ecc 5:18 NKJV** - Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.

**Ecc 5:19 NKJV** - As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor--this is the gift of God.

**Ecc 5:20 NKJV** - For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.

## ILLUSTRATION

An American businessman was standing on the pier of a small coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large yellowfin tuna. The American complimented the fisherman on the quality of his fish.

“How long it took you to catch them?” The American asked.

“Only a little while.” The fisherman replied.

“Why don’t you stay out longer and catch more fish?” The American then asked.

“I have enough to support my family’s immediate needs.” The fisherman said.

“But,” The American then asked, “What do you do with the rest of your time?”

The Mexican fisherman said, “I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take a siesta with my wife, Maria, stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my amigos, I have a full and busy life.” The American scoffed, “I am a Harvard MBA and could help you. You should spend more time fishing, and with the proceeds, you buy a bigger boat, and with the proceeds from the bigger boat, you could buy several boats, and eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats.”

“Instead of selling your catch to a middleman, you would sell directly to the consumers, eventually opening your own can factory. You would control the product, processing, and distribution. You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, then LA, and eventually NYC, where you will run your expanding enterprise.”

The Mexican fisherman asked, “But señor, how long will this all take?”

The American replied, “15-20 years.” “But what then, señor?”

The American laughed and said, “That’s the best part. When the time is right, you would announce an IPO (Initial Public Offering) and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich, you would make millions.”

“Millions, señor? Then what?”

The American said slowly, “Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you can sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take a siesta with your wife, stroll to the village in the evenings where you can sip wine and play your guitar with your amigos...”



