

Ecclesiastes 4 New International Version (NIV)

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.

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

³ But better than both is the one who has never been born, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.

⁴ And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

⁵ Fools fold their hands and ruin themselves.

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

⁷ Again I saw something meaningless under the sun:

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!

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

¹⁰ If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.

But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.

¹¹ Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.

But how can one keep warm alone?

¹² Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

¹³ Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning. ¹⁴ The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. ¹⁵ I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king's successor. 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.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you suppose that we find oppression to be so reprehensible? Does it continue today? Is it really true that the oppressed “have no comfortable”? As followers of Jesus, what are we to do when we witness oppression?
2. Do you agree with the writer that “*all* toil” stems from envy? If not, why not?
3. If a person toils without an obvious heir, is this really meaningless? If not, why not?
4. The passage on the benefits of companionship and teamwork (v. 9-12) are quoted as “worldly wisdom” even today, but what are the spiritual applications of these truths?
5. The chapter ends (v. 13-16) with a brief commentary about the passing political popularity of a “fresh face.” Do we see examples of this in our world today?