

'SMOKE and MIRRORS'
(Seeing Through This World's Deceptive Fake Distractions)
Studies in Ecclesiastes

'Friend'

How many REAL friends do you have right now? Although friends change during all the 'season' changes of our lives, it's important to have at least a couple of true spiritual friends in your life (**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**). Too many people think they need lots of casual acquaintance friends to be feel secure about themselves, accepted by others and appreciated, but real friends from God are more than that. They aren't in our life just to be cheerleaders for us who keep our self-image *pumped up* and happy – most of these may even end up being *fair weather* friends who won't stick around when things go wrong in their or your life. These kinds of *friends* may even make matters worse when they abandon you when tough times come and you need them most. Their desertion proving they weren't true friends hurts as much as the malady you're experiencing. Some avoid making friends at all just to protect against the possibility of that happening, but isolation is not the way to go (**Proverbs 18:1**).

Carefully choosing a few good friends is important according to **Proverbs 12:26 and 27:17**. It has been said that a true friend is *someone who comes in when all others go out* – how many of those do you have in this *season of life* you're in?

According to God through Solomon in **Ecclesiastes 4**, difficulties and trials must come to help you recognize one or two true friends in your life: **"Two are better than one ... and a threefold cord is not quickly broken"** (**Ecclesiastes 4:9-10**). There will always be different friends in each season of life, but like our triune God Himself, everything '*under the sun*' goes **better (4:9, 13)** when we have a couple of committed friends to help us stay close to the Lord.

"This is My commandment, that you love (agape) one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you." (John 15:12-15)

- Real friendship is based on 'agape' (altruistic, unconditional) love
- Real friendship is willing to gladly 'die for' one's friend if necessary
- Real friendship is founded on a shared dedication to obey God's Word
- Real friendship is always open and honest, admonishing and correcting

We know this kind of sacrificial love is what the Lord Jesus Christ has for all who are trusting Him as their personal Lord and Savior, but it is also a definition of how believers should feel about each other (especially the few true friends He has brought into their life during some particular *season of life*) (**1 John 3:16**).

- Talk about how many *Christ-caliber* friends you have had in your life.
 - How many would you say God has placed in your life in this *season of life* you are now in?
- How many fellow Christians do you think, believe you are this kind of friend to them?
 - Are they right?
- What other ways besides *dying for one another* can you exhibit agape (*sacrificial love*) for the brethren?

‘Enduring Foul Weather ‘Under the Sun’

(When your ‘season of life’ is overcast with inclement weather)

Ecclesiastes 4

Summation: Chapter One -- ‘Life under the sun’ (life for ‘natural man’ is year-in, year-out cycles in nature and human society; ‘life under heaven’ (life for ‘spiritual man’) - God in heaven is above ‘life under the sun’ giving cyclical opportunity to know God and avoid feeling ‘*all is vanity and grasping for the wind*’.

Chapter Two -- ‘Everything one does ‘under the sun’ to get personal fulfillment and satisfaction ends up being ‘*vanity*’ (*eternal pointlessness*) and ‘*grasping for the wind*’ (*futile efforts to hang on to and possess temporary, passing things*) causing despair, depression and hatred of life. Solomon concludes that ‘*life under heaven*’ from God is better if one lives a simple lifestyle, works at a job he or she likes and is good at and leaves plenty of time to know and serve God.

Chapter Three -- ‘Life under heaven’ for one who knows God is understood as having ‘*seasons of life*’ that come and go throughout our ‘*life under the sun*’ on earth. Things, people and events all come and go during each season of our lives (*our birth, childhood, teenage years, adulthood, family / middle aged, seniority, elderly, death*). God’s people move through these stages graciously, accepting what God allows, knowing that accountability for the way we live is coming. Solomon’s advice is to just keep on living a simple life, doing something we are good at and enjoy, leaving plenty of time for getting to know and serve God better.

Chapter Four -- ‘*A Little Help From Your Friends*’...

Oppression ‘Under the Sun’

(‘Evil done under the sun’ = the oppressed without a comforter)

4:1-3 / **Better** to never have existed’

Covetousness ‘Under the Sun’

(Hard work and success ‘under the sun’ = envied by others for it)

4:4-6 / **Better** to work for ‘enough’ quietly

Isolation ‘Under the Sun’

(Accumulating wealth and ‘stuff’ ‘under the sun’ = no one to share with)

4:7-8 / **Better** to stop and consider ‘*what’s the point?!*’

Each of these common realities for God’s people living and working in the secular world ‘*under the sun*’ is made more difficult by having to go through it alone. Of course, true Christians have God’s presence to help them cope with oppression, envy, and disconnection, but having another dedicated Christian to be with, console, advise, and pray with them during such trials helps. Trials help show who your true friends really are – ‘*fair weather friends*’ will leave when it’s not fun or they can’t use you anymore. It hurts but it’s important to find out who your real friends are (*1 Corinthians 10:18-19*).

- Talk about this and any similar experience that’s helped you discover true friends in this season of your life.

Friendship ‘Under the Sun’

(Two or three good friends help endure the above and thrive from it)

4:9-12 / **Better** to have one or **even better** - two loyal friends

Discuss how these kinds of friends tend to come and go during the various seasons of life. Once in a while such friends remain friends for life even though you don’t see them often.

- Do you have any friends like this? Why are these ‘*lifer friends*’ so important?

Reality ‘Under the Sun’

(What’s right and good doesn’t always happen ‘under the sun’)

4:13-16 / **Better** to be unknown and wise, than connected with fools

- What do you think is the lesson to be learned and remembered by this parable of Solomon?