

THE BUDDY SYSTEM, ECCL.4

Something Worth Living For #4

◆**Intro:** I have sometimes teased my kids about how good they had it growing up, all the devices, and treats available to them. We didn't have instant pop-open play houses when we were kids. We used the couch cushions and blankets to create forts in the living room. We didn't have electric scooters to go on joy rides with. We made cars out of cardboard boxes and pretended we were going somewhere. When we did get wheels, they were hard steel skate wheels that clamped to the bottom of your tennis shoes and pinched your foot. We didn't have gummy bears or pop-rocks. We ate real rocks and played with sticks! We drank water from the garden hose, not from a bottle. We ate worms and shot BB guns and never even put an eye out. And we had friends. The outdoors was always crawling with kids in those days.

◆There's something to be said about friendships that makes life more worth living. The Teacher in Ecclesiastes seems to have noticed it already 3000 years ago.

◆**1. Linking theme:** What I'd like to do first is to ponder what if anything seems to link the pieces of our text together as a whole.

◆The first section observes the evil of oppression in humanity. And because of it the author laments even to the point of wondering if it's better not to be born. Some residents in Afghanistan might be wondering that these days due to the brutality of the Taliban.

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- ◆ The second piece considers the opposite ends of envious, individual achievement, and the foolishness of giving up on work altogether.
 - ◆ The next section, if you are paying attention, notices the value of community. Two are better than one.
 - ◆ The last piece looks at a foolish king who listens to no one, and a youth from nowhere that rises and gains a great following.
- ◆ Scholars debate how this section of the text all holds together and obviously we can gain various lessons from the teaching. I'd like to zero in on what I see common in all the sections of chapter 4: Friendship and community. Let's take a look. If I were to take a highlighter to this text I'd mark it like this.
- ◆ V1: "they have no comforter" (x2)
 - ◆ V4: "man's envy of his neighbor" (I think you'd have to agree that many people in our culture work not to just keep up with what everyone else has, but to get ahead of them, one of the main reasons we make brand new cars every year, and sell them *before* the actual calendar year we label them with.)
 - ◆ V8: "a man all alone", and "neither son, nor brother." (The two most immediate male relationships a man has, and also the most likely relatives to benefit from his own toil.)
 - ◆ V9 "two are better than one" (of which he then gives 3 illustrations...)

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- ◆V10 "his friend can help" and "no one to help"
 - ◆V11 "can one keep warm alone?"
 - ◆V12 "two can defend themselves."
 - ◆V13 "knows how to take warning"
 - ◆V16 "not pleased with the successor"
- ◆Each of these phrases emphasize the same reality: people are always better off in harmony with others. This is something worth living for.

◆V1 people get oppressed when they have no one to help. The powerful don't care.

◆V4 envy separates people. We compare, and the others become our competition.

◆V8 the guy who is still at the office on Christmas Eve obviously has no one. He's alone. The job doesn't give him company.

◆V9 One is the loneliest number that you'll ever do. Two is not just as bad as one. Life is better together. It's why on school field trips we have a "buddy system". It's why there are such things as "copilots", even though you have a pilot. Because...

◆V10 It's harder to lose kids with a buddy. There's someone on your side if you get hurt.

◆V11 It's why as one homeless girl told me, all the homeless folk she knows sleep together in the stairwell

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of the parking garage in the winter. You can't keep warm alone.

◆V12 And you're safer running through Central Park at night if you don't jog alone.

◆V13 The king in this verse is his own rugged individual who knows everything already and is more right than everyone else, and disagrees with his military advisors. He doesn't listen to the people and he claims the buck stops with him alone! He does the opposite of what the people want just to prove he can, cuz he's king. People would rather follow a backcountry youth with no family name in the state capital, who listens to the people, the community.

◆Want to know a real life example of this? Solomon's son Rehoboam. (1 Kings 12:1–19). When Rehoboam refused the advice of his experienced counselors to lighten the "heavy yoke" that Solomon had imposed on the kingdom, a rebellion erupts, led by the fugitive Jeroboam, northern Israel's first king. Thereafter the Hebrew nation would always be a divided kingdom.

◆Let's draw some concluding applications from what we see here.

◆**2. Without other people in my life, I can easily become corrupt.** Solomon wrote in Proverbs that healthy spirituality learns not to trust our fallen nature and to fear the power of evil.

◆*There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. (Proverbs 16:25, NIV).*

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◆A. Even the nicest of people often do, or at least want, some of the most wrong things you can imagine. It is heightened by our rugged individualism. We live for ourselves. All fallen people are innately selfish to the core. The Teacher notes this in verse 4 (“all achievement springs from man’s envy of his neighbor”). Our first parents, Adam and Eve, had this very vice. They wanted the one food they couldn’t have. They were excited about having the knowledge God had and they didn’t!

◆This is why the business world has “accounting firms”. People goof off on the job and still take their pay. People will fudge on the bills or reports if it will give them gain. But people don’t like to have anyone know about it. We want to look better than the average guy. So accounting works. [It’s funny when you think about it. Most believe that they themselves don’t need accounting to another, but most are in favor of everyone else being accountable. Why is it we are so lenient and trusting of ourselves and not of others? Even accounting firms need to be audited by other firms to keep everything lined up right.]

◆B. I think the writer has Joseph in mind in verses 14-16. Joseph was a youth from nowhere, who rose out of prison, and was appointed to the highest ruling position in the nation under Pharaoh.

◆Genesis 41:41. So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.”

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- ◆ Genesis 41:57 And all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph. (Cf v15)
- ◆ But then times changed. And people forgot Joseph, as great a leader and historical figure as he was, just as v16 says.
 - ◆ Exodus 1:8, "Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph."
- ◆ I think the author is showing us the general wisdom of including other people in your life, or making friends and following wisdom of others. But he's also reminding us it is the way of sinful humanity to forget even the good things they had going. Even the greatest leader is not the solution to humanity's internal corruption.
- ◆ But it is wisdom to not go it alone. It is wisdom to not assume you are more able than you are. It is wisdom to be accountable and tell the truth to people around you. It is wisdom to admit you will never change yourself all by yourself, and that no, you can not "handle it." It is wisdom to not be a loner and just do your own thing.
 - ◆ *He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise. He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding.*
(Proverbs 15:31,32, NIV).
- ◆ Even in good things like trying to follow God, community is critical. No one truly worships God or follows him on their own. Jesus did not say he came to build up individual success stories.

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No, he said he came to build his ekklesia, (we translate *church*, but it means the *called together*.) You are not Christ's bride. The church/assembly is Christ's bride.

◆ Hence churches of all stripes have classes for learning, for bible study so as to become people like their Lord. There are small groups, Life Groups -which yes, require time, and commitment, and even inconvenience. -but God can do things in you that will never happen if you stick to yourself alone. As Paul puts it

◆ *"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you' " (1 Cor 12:21)*

◆ **Conclusion:** Where in your life are you trying to do it yourself. Perhaps the most basic place is your attempt to be a good person, to hope to live again after death. But how good is good enough? God's presence in your life, and eventual life in his Heaven requires holy perfection. You cannot get there alone. The good news is Jesus, God's son took the death your sins deserve for you! Ask him to forgive you and lead you. That is the only community that will take care of your corruption.

◆ On top of that, is your marriage crumbling, are there impasses between you and your spouse. If you are like most people you will keep this quiet until things are too far gone. But what if you were to admit two are better than one and three (a counselor perhaps) make a really strong cord possible?

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◆ Are you stuck in a habit you tell yourself you can handle but really you're a slave to it? You will not win alone.

◆ Listen, the answer is not simple going to church. People come in here all the time just wearing their church face. You know, we smile, we're nice, and disappear really quickly after, all the while there's a lot of darkness underneath. (If you knew what my kids did on the way here, you might wonder if they'll make it til tomorrow! -Oh Hi, God bless! Amen!) Big gatherings represent community, but real community comes in smaller numbers where you share life, admit faults, listen to correction, etc. It's where the command to love your neighbor begins. Your call, is to be to other people what God has been to you

◆ be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" Phil 2:1-4