

Eternal PERSPECTIVE *Ecclesiastes*

BIBLE TEXT | ECCLESIASTES 4:1-16

1 Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. **2** And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. **3** But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

4 Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

5 The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.

6 Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

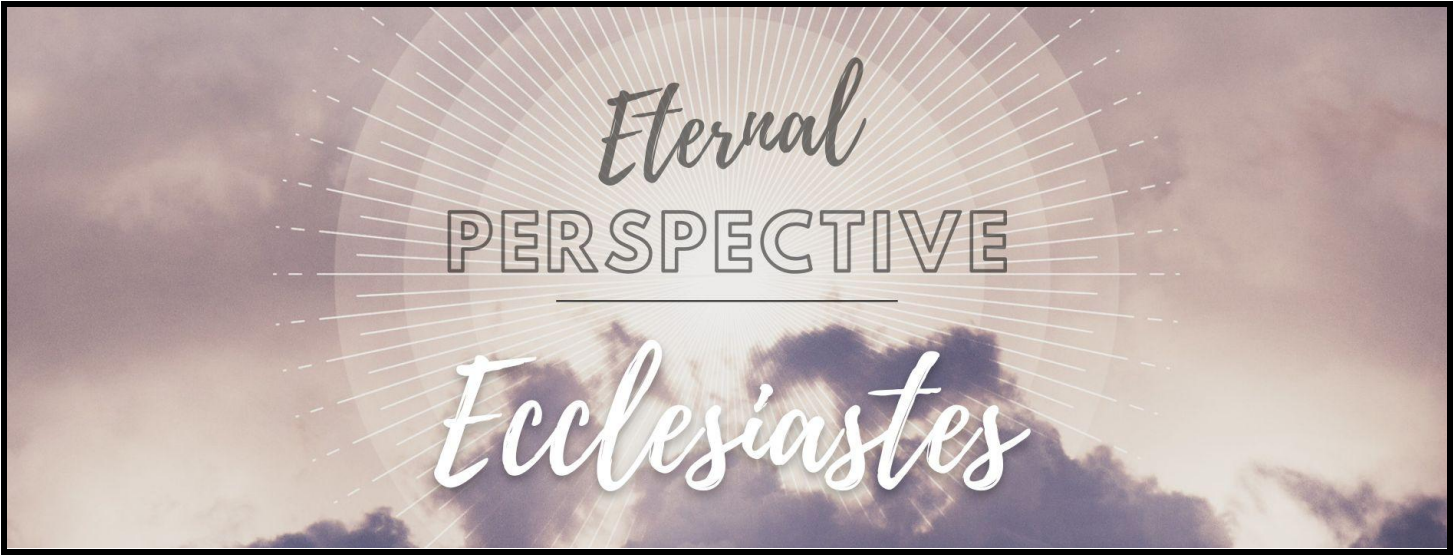
7 Again, I saw vanity under the sun: **8** one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling

and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. **10** For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! **11** Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? **12** And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

13 Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice.

14 For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. **15** I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. **16** There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.



Eternal PERSPECTIVE *Ecclesiastes*

DEVOTIONAL FOR ECCLESIASTES 4:1-16

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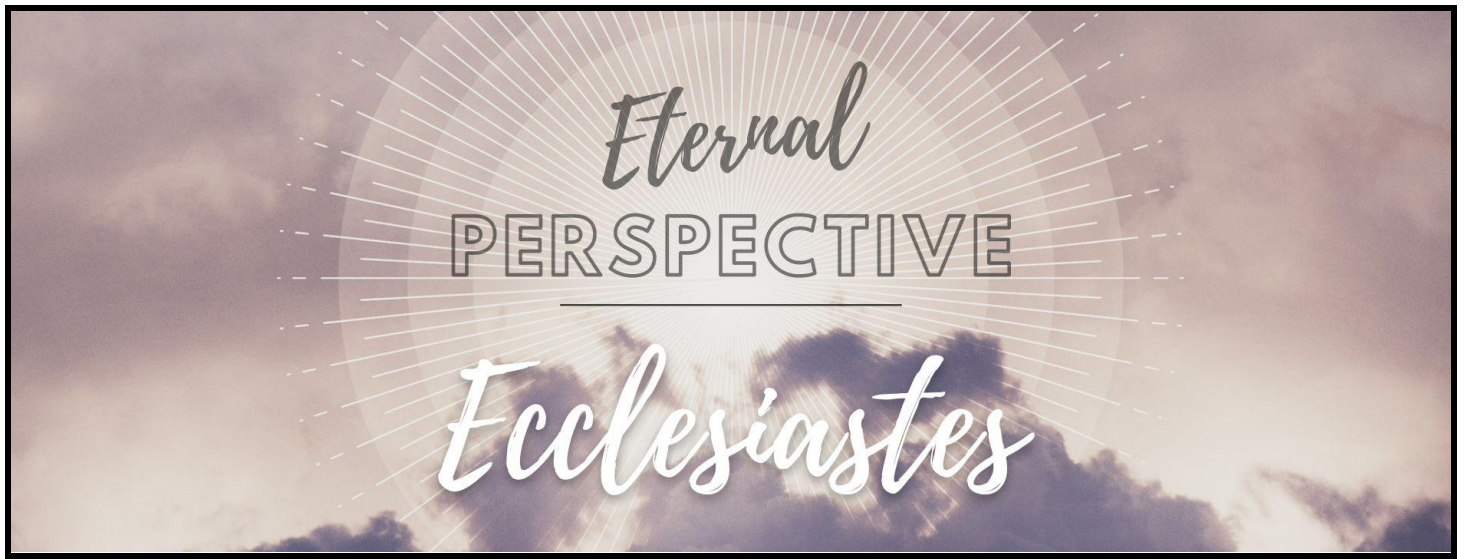
It's easy to read through Ecclesiastes and think "How depressing!" (Anyone else?) In chapter 4, Solomon continues with his repeated phrase that toil, labor, and life, in many ways, is "vanity and a striving after the wind" (verses 4, 16). I believe he got to this point, the solemnity of this book, out of his own life experiences. This was a young king who loved the Lord with all his heart, and when asked by the Lord what he wanted, he asked for wisdom, which pleased God greatly to give to him (1 Kings 3:3-14). However, by this point in his life (near the end of his reign), Solomon had turned from the Lord and worshipped the gods of his wives (1 Kings 11:9-10). He began searching for satisfaction in earthly things, rather than keeping his eyes and heart firmly fixed on the Lord and the eternal.

Such a sad story, and yet one that is personally familiar to me. After coming to know Christ at a very young age and experiencing His very real presence in my life, I began to experiment with the things of the world in my teenage years. I found myself desperately broken, seeking approval and worth from the creation, rather than the Creator. After walking through a divorce in my mid-thirties, I, like Solomon, thought it would be better to have never been born than to struggle with, see, and experience the evil deeds of this life (verse 3). It was a very dark time in my life, and I imagine if I had written a book, it would've been apparent. But it was in this season of my life that the Lord graciously pursued me in my mess, and encouraged me to "return home" (Luke 15:11-24), where a long journey of healing began to take place.

First, I had to begin rebuilding my relationship with my heavenly Father. I needed to know Him in a way, an intimate way, that I never had before, and I needed to understand His truths. With the Holy Spirit's guidance and power, I began to read God's word every day. Change began to happen within me.

Second, I got plugged into a local body of believers and into a small group. Because of my past life experiences, I struggled so much with trusting people in general. It was easy for me to isolate. But after being in God's word, I realized this wasn't His design. In obedience, not because it was easy, I took steps to surround myself with other believers who would speak into my life. I began to experience what Solomon spoke of in verses 9-12: "two are better than one". I needed other people to speak the truth in love to me so that I could grow in my relationship with God, and not find myself seeking after things that are vain and lead to destruction (Ephesians 4:15-16).

How about you? Are these two things a priority in your life and reflected in how you live? Or are you living in vain?



Questions:

1. Does this devotional resonate with you? What steps do you need to take?
2. Are the things that you are spending your time, energy, and resources on eternal? Or are they "vanity and a striving after the wind?" Share your answers to questions #1 and #2 with your Journey Group or other biblical community.
3. Read 1 Kings 3 and 1 Kings 11. Compare and contrast where Solomon was in his relationship with the Lord. What are some ways that this happens in our lives today?