**How can God be good if His world is bad?**



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**Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:16**

If you have your Bibles, go to Ecclesiastes chapter 3 and 4. We are going to let King Solomon open up with our introduction. Here is what King Solomon says.

**Scripture:**

**Ecclesiastes 3:16 *Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.***

**Ecclesiastes 4:1 *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.***

What I want to ponder this morning is how can God be good if the world is bad? That is sort of what King Solomon is leading with. He is looking around the world and what he sees is injustice and oppression. Maybe you have those same thoughts. When I open up my news app, when I am scrolling social media, when I am just going to work, having family dinner, and going to Thanksgiving, what I often find is there are a lot of problems. There is a lot of brokenness, evil, and sin. Things are just not the way I thought they should be. Who should we talk to about that? When the world is broken, as we feel it in our own lives and in the world at large, who do we talk to about that? Who do we complain to? If we have a Christian worldview, the obvious answer would be God. If God made this and it is all kind of really bad, then who is He? If He a good God if the world we hold and walk on and correspond in is broken and bad? We feel it. We see it. We hear it. It does not seem like this is a good place, so is there really a good God who made this? Or, could it be that the one who made this is actually not all good? In other words, does a bad world prove a bad God? The way we feel, the way we walk through life –– does it mean maybe God is not as good as we thought He is? That is the angst in King Solomon’s soul…he is looking at the world and seeing that it is very broken. What do I do with all of the brokenness?

So, what we are going to walk through first is that idea of if the world is bad how can God be good? We are going to walk through the end of chapter 3 and then we are going to hopefully walk through all of chapter 4 as we wrestle with these questions that King Solomon is asking, and he does not always give us the answers, but the Bible certainly does. So, we are going to get to some of these real questions of life hurts and it is broken, can God still be good. In verse 16 of chapter 3, it says this, “Moreover, I saw under the sun…” That term, “under the sun,” is repeated all through Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is one of those strange books in your Bible, meaning you have to have some lenses to see it by. So King Solomon is looking at the world under the sun, and he says “under Heaven” sometimes. What that means is he is going to sort of take God out of the equation for a minute, not as an atheist –– he still believes God created the world –– but what if we set our biblical worldview aside and we leave God out, and look at the world just for the world’s sake. Can we make sense of the world as it is apart from God? So this idea of “under the sun” is when he takes God out and just looks at the world, he finds some problems.

The first problem he finds is injustice. Notice what he says picking back up in verse 16, “…that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.” He is going into the court system of his day and when he looks at thesecourt cases, he finds that the innocent often are made guilty and the guilty are often made innocent because of who they are, how much they have, and who they are connected with. Even in the court systems of the world, it seems like those who are connected can do whatever they want and those who are not connected aren’t going to get away with much. He feels this injustice. He feels what all of our kids feel and protest to you…*Mom that is not fair!* Have you ever gotten that before with your kids? Dads, have you ever heard that? What do you automatically respond to them? Life is not fair. We are all sort of mad that life does not work out, that when we do right we often get wronged, and when someone does wrong, they don’t often get what is coming to them. In fact, when you think about other people, we usually demand justice for those who do wrong to us, but then when we do something wrong we want grace. When I do something wrong, I want grace and mercy, and when you do something wrong, I want you to pay for it because the world should be just.

So Solomon is crying out because of this idea that in the place of justice there is wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there seems to be unrighteousness. There seems to be wickedness. So our question is if the world is broken and unjust then how can God be good? And the first thing that I want to point out is that his decry is really an apologetic to the fact that God is just. If you think about it, what is his complaint? It is that the world is unjust. There is wickedness instead of justice. So his complaint is the world should be just, the world should be fair, and it should not be wicked, it should not be unrighteous. No matter whether you are a Christian or a Non-Christian, as humans we all believe the world should be fair. The world should be a place where right is right and wrong is wrong, however you define that. We have all of our own definitions of what is right and what is wrong. But your definition of justice –– everyone should be in that form of justice because we all believe that the world should be a fair and just place –– so whatever your view of fair and just is, we believe the world should be like that. It should not be unjust. It should not be filled with wickedness. Wicked people should pay and innocent people should have a good life. Well, why do we feel that way? In other words, if you take God out of the equation there is no reason the world should be just. There is no reason the world should be good if we take God out of the equation because if we are all accidents, if we all just appear here and we can all define our own realities, then why is it not that injustice is the normal and justice is the abnormal? Why is it not that wickedness is applauded and innocence is a vice?

See, the reason Solomon is decrying I want the world to be just is because he is made in the image of God and he has a long memory back to a garden where a good God made a good world. And, guess what? All of us have that same long memory. We all know deep in our bones that we are made in the image of God and that somehow this world was supposed to be good, it was supposed to be better than it is. So our cry for justice does not point to our God is bad, it actually points to our God is good, He is just, and that is why we want justice, but something has gone wrong. That is why every worldview, a Christian worldview, secular worldview, or atheistic worldview, whatever worldview that you or your friend holds, has to answer four questions.

**1. How did we get here?**

**2. What is wrong with the world?**

**3. What hope do we have?**

**4. Where is it all going?**

Those are the questions that every worldview has to answer. How did we get here? We have an answer. God made us in His image. We have other worldviews that say we are just accidents or it was a big bang. It just sort of happened. But even that atheistic worldview has to answer this question: What is wrong with the world? Atheists are not saying the world is actually perfect and great. No, they are like us, decrying the world is broken and something is really wrong. So, even an atheist worldview has to answer what is wrong with the world. Every worldview has to answer that. Why does every worldview have to answer that question? Why does every worldview *have* an answer to that question? It is an apologetic for God is good, because we know something has gone wrong. We know something is broken. That is why we have our outcry for justice, because we know that wickedness should not rule in the place of what is good, right, and true. So, even his looking at the world and thinking the world should be good actually points to a good God, and that is what we need to make sure we know. In our longings for goodness and justice, it is pointing to the fact that God is actually a good God.

Solomon comes up with some reasonings. Here is his reasoning in verse 17, “I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.” He concludes there is a lot of injustice, there is a lot of bad things that are even happening to people who are doing well. They are not getting what their labors are fruitfully earning them. There is just a lot of bad that is happening and a lot of people are getting away with a lot of things. He says I have concluded that there is a day coming that God is going to judge both the wicked and the righteous. There is a day coming when God will judge the world. So, his conclusion is yes, things are not always going to work out right in your life, at work, in your family, in our culture, and in the world. There are some really bad things that are happening, but our cry for justice will be appeased because God has fixed a day when He will judge the world. Do you know what that means for us as Christians? We don’t have to make all of the wrong that happens against us right. We can actually trust God and leave all the wrong done to us in the hands of God who is going to judge those who do wrong to us in the end. We can leave it to the judgement seat of Christ.

In fact, what we see in Amos 5:24 is this, “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” See, that is how the way of the world should be, but it is not the way the world is, and that is Solomon’s crux. The world should be justice flowing like water, but it is not. Amos says, but it is coming, it is going to happen. Then we see in the New Testament, Romans 2:16, “On that day {that is the Day of Judgment} when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.” For some of you, you are troubled this morning because you see that coworker who gets away with everything and never gets caught. You know that they are doing things wrong and it breaks your heart, it makes you angry. You are saying…*Why does the world not make sense? I am working hard with integrity and she is doing all of that, she is rising through the ranks and I am not…* We are outraged because things are not working. Life is not fair. Solomon says that is what I see! But then he concludeswhat I do know is that even though I am looking at life under the sun there is a God above the sun. He is going to judge everything. So in one sense, we can leave the judgment to the Lord. We don’t have to take it upon ourselves.

Not only does God have final judgement so we can rest and trust in Him, but the second thing Solomon says is that the wickedness and injustice actually leads us to resolve a few things. Number one, we are really like the beast. Look down with me in verses 18–21, “I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. 19 For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. 20 All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. {That is a quote from Genesis chapter 3 after the curse of Adam.} 21 Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?” So, he is saying what I see is because of this wickedness and injustice (I know God is going to judge, but right now when wickedness prevails) it is testing man. The wickedness spreading upon the earth is testing man so that we would see that we are like beasts.

Now, what does he mean by like “beasts?” I don’t think he means that we are like uncontrolled animals, although it is kind of like that sometimes, but that is not his main point. His main point is that we are like beasts in the fact that we too are going to die. What happens to animals? They live and they die. What happens to us? Well, first of all, we were made in the image of God to live forever. Adam and Eve were supposed to live forever, but because of sin, what did God tell Adam in Genesis 3 after the fall? You came from the dust and now because of your sin you are going to back to the dust. So sin reveals and shows us that we are going to be like beasts, we also are going to die. We are also going to be like animals.

See, for us, we are sort of separated from death in our culture. It is just a natural fact of modern culture. We go through McDonald’s, get a happy meal, and we don’t realize that there were some unhappy things that happened before the things got into that sack. Things died and we don’t see the death, we don’t see the blood, we just see the happy meal. There are just some things that happen that we don’t like to see. We don’t like to think about death. Right now, we are in the few weeks where the deer are going crazy because the rut is happening. All of us vividly see death all throughout the roads. You have probably passed many roads coming here where a dead deer carcass is laying on the side of the road. What Solomon is saying iswhen you drive your car and you see that dead, rotting carcass, and every day it is more decayed and disgusting…that is you. That is what you are going to be like. We are going to put you in a grave and that is what is going to happen to you. You are going to rot in a grave. Because of sin, because of wickedness, that is our fate. We are just like the beasts. They have breath; we have breath. They die and guess what? We die. So today, when you see that dead deer carcass, I want you to think this thought, Solomon wants you to have this thought –– that is going to be me. I am going to be like that in the ground. I am going to rot like a deer. Me…made in the image of God, with value, dignity, and worth…I am going to rot in a grave just like a deer. That is what he wants you to feel. He's saying what advantage do we have? We still die…that is his point.

Then, Solomon says we are not even sure if animals go down and we go up. It is sort of a rhetorical statement. He is just pondering deep questions. He has an angst. He is looking at life under the sun, taking God out, and reasoning that if we die like animals, we are not really sure what happens in the end. He raises a question that I want the Bible to answer because I think it is a beautiful question. Verse 22 says this, “So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?” In other words, all of the injustice that you see, all of the sin that you see –– God says I am dealing with it, but secondly, let it remind you that sin is leading you to death. You are going to die just like a deer carcass. You are going to rot in a grave. So Solomon’s question, who can come after and tell you what is going to happen next? That is the hanging question. Now, I would be in the background saying…*Solomon, I have this one! Hey, Solomon! Right here! I know the guy you are looking for. I know Him!!!* *HIS NAME IS JESUS! He is the one who can answer the question. He can answer what is coming next when we go into a grave just like the animals do.*

For instance, in John 11, Jesus’ friend Lazarus has been dead for four days. He is a rotten deer carcass. Blood. Yuck. Smell. Martha comes to Jesus and it says in verses 23–26, “Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”’ So, the world is unjust. There are a lot of bad things happening. It is not fair. But God has got it and He will judge the world through Christ. Because there is injustice, we all die because we all share in that injustice. You have done things that are unjust. You have done things that are wrong and wicked, therefore, you will die and rot like a deer carcass. And, who knows what is going to happen next? Oh, Jesus does! Jesus answers for us what will happen next. If we believe in Him, if we put our trust in Him, the death will not be our end. We will not just die like a deer. We will rise to new life and live with Him forever. There is this hope in the midst of all of the injustice and all of the wickedness that we not only see, but we also participate in.

See, in one instance we want God to get rid of all of the evil in the world. Guess what? That means He would get rid of you! If God stops the evil, He stops your heart because your heart is pumping some of that evil into the system. You are part of the problem, so God kills you if He gets rid of all evil, but He has a better plan to get rid of evil without killing you, by giving you life, eternal life. Jesus is saying…*I am the one who is going to come after you and show you what is going to come and it is by believing in me that you get the gospel*. So, we see that yes, the world is broken, we are going to die, but through Christ, we will live forever.

Solomon has another angst about the world. Notice what he says in chapter 4, verse 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.” So, we have oppression without comfort. There are people who are oppressed and they are without comfort. He sees this all through life. He sees there are people in power and rather than using their power for good in the world, they are using their power to exploit others, to become more powerful, and to have advantages. He says he can see this (and by the way, he is the king so he would have been a part of this), and he is like this is not good. All people should be equal and we should love our neighbors as ourselves. We should be for each other, not against each other. He is decrying the oppression that is happening all around him.

First of all, I just want to point out that Solomon noticing this points to the reality that God is actually good even though the world is broken, because without God there is no issue with oppression. Let’s just be honest! If we believe that evolutionary biology is true, that we are all just accidents, it was a big bang, and the reason we are all here is the thing called the survival of the fittest, then oppression is our highest good. That is what we *should* do. You should try to oppress others around you so that you and your family will win. It is completely normal if God is not God and we are just here for our own selves. See, it is only a problem if we have a God who made all people in His image. That is the only reason that oppressing another human being would be wrong, it is if God created all people in His image and all people have equal value, dignity, and worth. That is when it becomes a problem. Without God, there is no problem. We can just fight and do whatever we want. Whoever wins is the best and whoever loses just loses because it is survival of the fittest and the weakest are going to die out. That is perfectly fine, that is perfectly normal, but no one believes that! No one thinks that is how the world should be. Everyone is against oppression, however you define it, however you see it, you know in your mind this shouldn’t be. You know that in some way everyone should be treated with value, dignity, and respect. You know there shouldn’t be people who exploit others. We fight against that. Why? Because we have a good God who made a good world even though we find it broken. So because we are angry with exploitation, it actually points to, not that our God is bad and He made the world bad, but it means our God is good and He made a good world. And we have a long memory to a garden and a long memory to the way things should be, though they are not right now, and we long for that. We yearn for that. It points to the reality that God is actually good.

If you think about, even during Solomon’s day, he would have seen and remembered. Just think about his own people, the Hebrews. They were slaves in Egypt. He could remember very vividly that his forefathers were made slaves and were forced to make bricks. He would remember that other human beings were oppressing other human beings for their own advantage. We can see in our memory the European and American slave trade where human beings were treated as property. They were exploited; they were oppressed for another’s good. We can see even right now that there are more slaves on planet Earth than in any other time in the history of the world because of human trafficking, one of the evils in our time. Human beings are being sold as property right now in our time all across the world. We see these oppressors and oppression. We can see even right now in Russia and Ukraine. We can think about some of the Ukrainian people who are going to freeze to death. Why? Because we have an oppressor who is oppressing. We can see this and our hearts decry, “God, where are you?” All throughout history bad things have happened, people have exploited people, and we ask, “God, where are you?” If there are little girls who are being sold, “God, where are you?” If there are people in Ukraine who are going to die, “God, where are you? If you made this world, you are in charge of this world, people are oppressed and there are oppressors, should you not be coming and doing something?”

Can you feel Solomon’s heart? Can you feel your own heart? There is some real brokenness and if God is good then why is the world so broken? Why is the world the way that it is? I think one thing we have to see is that God is not absent in the midst of all that we see in the world. We can even think back to the example of the Hebrews in Egypt. God heard their cry and what did He do? He sent Moses and Moses redeemed the people. Throughout history, we can see Christian heroes like William Wilberforce who stood and helped abolish slavery. We can see heroes like Martin Luther King Jr. who stood up so that all people would be treated equal with dignity, rights, and values. We can see right now athletes like Tim Tebow who loves Jesus, who has a lot of money, who has a lot of influence, and has made nonprofit organizations and spends his money to fight human trafficking right now. It is not just that there is oppression and God is not doing anything; God is sending comfort and He is sending comfort through His people who actually care. See, one thing we see about God in the New Testament is He actually sends THE comforter, the Holy Spirit, our advantage, our ‘Paraclete,’ our comforter, and our aide. We get the comforter in our hearts and then we go to those places where see things that should not be and we work to alleviate those things, whether it is in our family, in our work, or wherever we go, we are looking for ways because we believe the world should be a place where we love our neighbors rather than try to exploit them.

So, we see Solomon is decrying this idea that we just see oppression, and what he says is this in verses 2–3, “And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.” Basically, the oppression is so bad that it is actually better for the dead, and it is actually better for the ones who have not even been born yet. It would be better to not be born than to live in the world filled with injustice and oppression. Again, he is feeling that under the sun weight of if we take God out for the moment, we see that people don’t do so well. We don’t live so well. What we really need is the Lord’s justice and the Lord’s comfort to come upon us and to help us.

So, the first thing that we see that we really wrestle with is this question: If the world is bad then how can God be good? Hopefully, we have answered these questions by saying because we are mad that the world is bad, it actually reveals that God is good. Because if God is not good, then there is no anger that the world is bad. Bad should be normal. There is no reason that is should be abnormal. Injustice and oppression? Who says those are bad things? Oh, God does! Because God is just, good, and holy, and He is for the oppressed and is opposed to the oppressor. That is how we know those things are good. That is why in our hearts we feel anger towards those things. It is because God is good although we live in a bad world. It is like if you buy a car from the dealership and then you drive it down the road and wreck it, you don’t take it back to the dealership and say, “There is something wrong with my car. It is not going right.” They would be like, *“*Well, you wrecked it.”“But you said it was a good car!” “Well, yeah it was, but you wrecked it.” We are the people who are taking all of our problems to God and saying…*God, what did you do? This thing is wrecked. It doesn’t run right*. God is saying…*umm, yeah! Do you remember the garden? You chose you, and it is not working well.* See, we are driving cars that are completely broken and we are mad at God because they are broken. God is saying that is not the car that I gave you. And the good news is it is not the car that you are going to be left with. There is a new car coming. There is a new creation coming where there will be justice that will roll down like the rivers. The oppressed will be liberated and the oppressors will get what is coming to them. Justice will happen. So yes, God is good even though the world is bad. And our good God is not leaving the world bad; He has a plan to redeem it through Christ.

Now, we have about fifteen minutes left for other thoughts. That is sort of how Solomon works; it’s just his way of preaching this sermon so we are going to preach the sermon like he does. The main point was God is good even though the world is bad. Take that home. Now here is fifteen minutes of other things. I love preaching one theme or one takeaway, but that is not Solomon, so we are going to follow all of the rabbit trails.

Problem number three is this: good work comes from bad motives. Let’s look in verse 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.” So, good work comes from bad motives. He says I look and I see invention, I see skill, I see hard work, I see entrepreneurship, and do you know what all of it is from? It is not that I love my neighbor, but it is that I am jealous, envious, and I want to beat my neighbor. Think about this…the reason your Ford truck is so great is because there is a company called Chevy. Really! I mean, it would still be the same model that it was but your Chevy would not be great if it was not for Ford. Ford does not think…every day let’s make our neighbors look better. No, every day they are thinking let’s beat Chevy because we want to sell more cars. A lot of the good things we have really just comes from competitiveness and wanting to beat everybody. So I think our lesson is as Christians that is not how we should work. We should not work to produce, build, and use our skills just to beat our neighbor. We should work and use our skills to LOVE our neighbor, to produce good things to help other people up, not just to beat the guy or girl down the road just so we can look better and have more stuff. So a real angst in life is that good things often come from bad motives. So don’t produce good things from bad motives, produce good things from good motives.

That is kind of a problem from work and now we are going to get some life hacks. These are things you can take home, practical, tactile things that you can take home. Here is life hack number one: find contentment in your work. Notice what it says in verse 5, “The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.” The opposite of working to compete and beat so that you can have everything is doing nothing. It is folding your hands, playing video games, and hoping someone will pay for your life, like…*This is awesome. This is what I think life is about. I am going to be lazy, not do anything, and hope everything works out!* Solomon says it is going to be fun for a little bit, but you are going to starve! You are eventually going to die. Especially in his day, if you don’t work, you don’t eat. Good luck with that! So don’t be lazy and do nothing.

But then, the opposite is being a workaholic. He says this in verse 6, “Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.” So, two handful of toils is like work, work, work and that is all you care about, that is all you do, and that is your whole life. He says do you know what would be better? To have one handful of quietness. And I think that is contentment –– it is working hard, but then resting. It is working hard, but then having a family, enjoying life, having friendship, and not making work your whole life. It is having a balance. This was the first work-life balance (He could have written a book on this)! This is having contentment in your work. A real takeaway is do you find contentment in your work? Is it your idol, in that you spend all of your time doing it and thinking about it? Or, is it a good thing, but not a God thing? You can actually have contentment. You can work, but also have joy.

Life hack number two: cultivate friendship. This is going to be really important to Solomon. Cultivate friendship. So, the first thing we are going to see is the lone ranger. Just picture the lone ranger riding into town with his horse, guns blazing, and does not need anybody. He is independent, is his own man, has the big hat and big boots, but rides away into the woods by himself. Just think about that. Here is what we see in verses 7–8, “Again, I saw vanity under the sun: 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.” This verse is about the lone ranger guy. You are working like crazy, but you have no son, you have no brother, you have no friend, and you have no one to share it with. It is just you. You are an independent individual. You are going to build your empire. You are going to build your success. You don’t need anybody else. This is like the American dream –– just do it on your own and get to the top. Then, you are like…*Nobody is here. Who do I high five? Yay, go me!* It is not that fun! You need other people. You need to cultivate friendship. Again, you ride into town as the lone ranger and then you ride out by yourself, and then you are by a campfire and cooking hotdogs by yourself. You are telling stories to yourself. It is not that fun! It is romantic, it is heroic, but it leads to an empty life, so don’t be the lone ranger; instead, cultivate friendship.

We are going to see four reasons to cultivate friendship. The first one is going to be reward. Verse 9 says, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.” So cultivate friendship, reason one, because it is a reward. When you do something together, it is that “two is better than one,” which is his main statement to cultivate friendship, cultivate community, cultivate family, and cultivate people in your life. Guess what? You need people and people need you. You were not made for isolation. You were not made to live alone, to think alone, and be alone with yourself. You were made for people. You were made for community. You need friendship. You need companionship. It’s a reward. Teamwork is dream work, right? We want to work with teams. We want to have celebration. And when you win, at the end of the day you have a group of people that you can celebrate with. If you don’t have people, then your work is not going to be as rewarding as it could be. You need people to celebrate your successes and to celebrate life with you so that it becomes more meaningful because you were made for community. It is not just work; this is all of life –– to share life and community together.

Reason two, we see safety. Verse 10 says this, “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!” This is like the beginning of OSHA. Don’t get on a ladder by yourself. Have a buddy hold the bottom of the ladder. It is a real principle! Don’t do stuff on your own because if you fall no one is there to pick you up, no one is there to help you, so do stuff in community with other people. In practical life, that is a good idea, but I think in a real spiritual way you also need that in the community of people that you are around. You need people who are there so when you fall you don’t stay down. You need people so that when you get hit, somebody comes along side of you, encourages you, calls you out, rebukes you, or befriends you- whatever you need to get you back up walking with the Lord Jesus. See, as a Christian you are going to have some bumps, you are going to fall down, you are going to have some mishaps, you are going to have some mistakes, and if you are by yourself it will linger. But if you have a friend, if you have companions, they can lift you up. They can get you back to where you need to go. So, you need to cultivate friendship for safety in life, but also in Jesus.

Reason three, for provision. Verse 11 says this, “Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?” In Near Eastern culture, when they were traveling it would have gotten really cold at night. If you were by yourself then you were probably going to die from hypothermia. You need a buddy! We always go camping once a year with the boys’ adventure club with New Covenant. I love it! This year only G got to spend all night because the other two had basketball games. I told G it would get really cold. I said, “G, I just want to let you know Daddy is going to snuggle with you all night.” He was like, “WHAT?! You are going to do what with me?” I said, “Yeah, I am going to get cold and you are my electric blanket. So, I am going to snuggle you. I am just warning you that I am going to snuggle you a lot.” So, he says, “Ok.” Sure enough, I got a lot of snuggles because I was cold! And, guess what? I cannot warm myself up, but he is like a little heater blanket. I was like, “Yeah, that feels good!” Then he was like, “Yeah that does feel good.” Yes, we warmed each other up. And guess what? You as a human being cannot warm yourself up. Do you know what you need? You need another human being with flesh and blood to warm you up, and not just physically, think about spiritually. You cannot always warm yourself. You are going to be cold. You are going to be apathetic. You are not going to want to follow Jesus. You are going to just want to give up. You need another human being in your life who is rubbing shoulders with you so their heat and their passion transfers to you and you stay warm because of them. And, guess what? They need your warmth as well.

The last reason we cultivate friendship is for protection. Verse 12 says this, “And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” There are going to people who want to come get you. They are going to be after you. Think about Near Eastern culture. They are traveling places. There are going to be people who are going to try to steal and kill them. If you are alone then you are a target. If you have people around you, you have safety. You have somebody that has your back. You have protection. As a believer, there is an evil one with fiery darts who wants to deploy them on you at all times. Do you know what you need? You need a couple of people around you that can help fight off the enemy, who can help you fight the good fight so that you are not just alone swinging. Somebody has your back, you have their back, and you are in it together. You are warring together.

See, Solomon is saying don’t be a lone ranger. Cultivate friendship because in friendship, even though the world is broken, it is unjust, and there is a lot of oppression, do you know what you need? You need a good community. You need some good people to walk through life together.

Our last life hack, number three, is keep listening. It is kind of a strange story, but just stick with me. Verse 13 says this, “Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice.” So, the obvious answer is there is an old king who loses his palace because he forgot to take advice. There is a young, poor guy who actually gets a throne because he is wise, listens, and takes advice. So real practically before we go any further, you need to be a person who continues to seek and to savor advice. Wisdom comes through your ears not your mouth. Wisdom comes in your ears; you need to listen. You need to have counsel. You need to weigh other people in your life who are speaking truth to you. When you become your own truth in yourself, you are in trouble.

Notice what happens to this king, verse 14, “For he {this is the young, poor, wise one} went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor.” So he actually outdoes the king because the king forgot to take advice and forgot to listen, so this poor young boy that is in prison actually takes the throne. Verses 15–16 say, “I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. 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.” It is a story about this young boy who is wise. He starts out in prison, and though he is in prison, he works his way all the way up to the throne. There is a king who is in the palace, rightfully there. He is probably rich, he is probably old, and he forgets to take advice. He ends up getting dethroned. The point is don’t become like the old king. Don’t stop listening to instruction. Don’t stop being wise. Instead, be like the young, poor king.

Now, I am not saying Solomon meant this when he wrote this, but when I read this there was a name that jumped out of my mind. Can you think of a guy in the biblical storyline who went from prison to a throne position in a kingdom and then did great things through God? It sounds like Joseph, right? It sounds like the story of Joseph and I just want to think about that. Again, I am not saying that Solomon meant this when he wrote this, but for me this is a perfect illustration of Joseph’s life. So let’s just connect all of the dots together because Joseph was first a guy who was treated unjustly. His brothers sold him into slavery. Talk about a guy who could have said…*Hey, this pit is not fair, God!!!*...*Yeah, life is not fair, Joseph, but just deal…*He was treated unjustly. Then, he faced what? Oppression! He is ridiculed, he is maligned, he is put into prison, and he has to wait in prison. He is completely oppressed and completely treated unjustly, but what does he do? He trusts the Lord. And from prison, he goes all the way to the throne, rules over Egypt, and saves all of God’s people. Do you know what he says at the end when his brothers said why do you not want to kill us? He said, what you meant for evil, God meant for good.

Now, let’s just think about this and all that we have read. We are looking at the world. It is unjust, it is oppressed, and there are all sorts of bad things happening. What do we do with that? What the world means for evil (often at me), guess what I can know? Just like Joseph who was unjustly treated, oppressed, and dealt with all this evil, behind the scenes God used it for good. In your life, when you are treated unjustly, when you are oppressed, however that looks, you can know what the world means for evil, God means for good. Of course, we can jump right over to Joseph’s older, older, older, older brother –– who is Jesus Christ, who was obviously unjustly treated. He was falsely accused, put on a cross for crimes He did not commit, and He was the ultimate example of a person oppressed. As they killed Him in injustice and oppression, what they meant for evil, God did what? God meant for good! Through that act of injustice and oppression, He saved the world. So what do we do with that? We can look to these examples. We can look to these guys who felt the weight of the world and the wrong of the world. And do you know what? They stood the course and they believed that God is good even though the world is bad. As we understand our world that we live in, yeah the world is bad, but guess what? God is still good. Know that in God’s goodness, He has a day of judgment coming and you can rest in that, and right now know that whatever happens to you that is evil, God can actually turn it around for good.

See, the last of the story that Solomon tells us about, he is kind of mad because that young boy who became king is soon forgotten. So Solomon says it is all vanity. Why even try? Why even be wise? Why even listen? You are going to die and you are going to be forgotten. I want to answer that this way –– the only way that story is vanity in the case of Joseph is if Joseph is the hero. See, if Joseph is the hero of that story then it is all vanity because he does all this and then he dies. Then, guess what? The next Pharaoh forgot Joseph and then enslaved his people. But the point is Joseph was never the hero. He is not the hero; God is the hero and God is always the hero. If you will remember that in your little story –– God is the hero and He has always been the hero –– then no matter what happens to you, oppression or injustice, do you know what you can do? You can point to Him and know that He has this, and He is working all things together for His good and this is not the way the world is going to be forever. He is bringing redemption, He is bringing something new, and in the midst of that, let’s be the people who work for justice and who work for those who are oppressed because we know that is not how the Kingdom is going to be.