

The Tragedies of Life

by David Hocking

The sermon explores the tragedies of life, including the lack of comfort and contentment, and offers a solution in eternal comfort and rest through God.

Duration: 44:42

Scripture: Proverbs 15:16-17, Proverbs 16:8, Ecclesiastes 4:1, Ecclesiastes 4:6

Topics: "Christian Living", "Spiritual Wisdom"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the tragedies of life as described in Ecclesiastes chapter 4. He highlights the oppression and lack of comfort experienced by the oppressed, using the imagery of a yard covered in nettles and a broken stone wall. The preacher warns against slothfulness and apathy, emphasizing the importance of wisdom and diligence. He addresses the issues of competition, jealousy, and envy in the marketplace, urging listeners to handle these problems with wisdom and not to be consumed by vanity. The sermon concludes with a reminder that a life lacking meaning is a grave misfortune, prompting listeners to reflect on their motivations and purpose in life.

Transcript

There are a lot of frustrations in life and many tragedies. But, uh, I just was captured by this particular one. This fella gave me this.

He knew that I was preaching on the tragedies and frustrations and difficulties of life. And he thought I would appreciate this one. Here's what he sent me.

He said, a certain preacher loved golf as much as anything else on earth. Not me, by the way. I'm not into golf.

I'm not into spirit-filled sports or tennis, racquetball, etc. Not golf. But anyway, this preacher loved golf.

He said golf was an absolute passion in his life. He played two or three times every week. And during one period of his ministry, his schedule was so packed with weddings, funerals, hospital visits, counseling sessions, preaching missions, he went for three weeks without playing one game of golf.

He was about to die. His schedule didn't offer any break in the weeks ahead, so finally his passion got the best of him. And he decided he'd pretend to be sick on Sunday morning.

Get someone else to preach for him. Drive 50 miles away to a neighborhood, neighboring town, where no one knew him and he'd play golf on Sunday. It was the only time he could find in the week.

On that given Sunday morning, he calls the chairman of the board, told him he was sick. Then he apologized to God, loaded up his clubs, headed for the golf course in that other city. As he teed up the ball on the first tee, an angel looked down from heaven, aghast.

Said, Lord, look at that. A preacher of your word playing golf on Sunday morning. How terrible.

Strike him dead. God was so upset that when he went on to the third hole, he sent a gust of wind that made the preacher's ball sink into the cup on the first shot. A hole in one.

The angel stood by, puzzled. Said, Lord, why did you do that? Is that supposed to be a punishment? God said, of course. Just think about it for a moment.

That's the first hole in one that preacher's ever made, but who can he tell about it? So to all of you that see that as frustrating, you are now ready for Ecclesiastes 4, the tragedies of life. Chapter 4, verse 1. Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done unto the Son. And look, the tears of the oppressed, but they have no comforter.

On the side of the oppressors there was power, but they have no comforter. Therefore I praise the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still alive. Yet better than both is he who has never existed, who has not seen the evil work that is done unto the Son.

Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work, a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind. The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.

Better is a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind. Then I returned and I saw vanity unto the Son. There is one alone without companion.

He has neither son nor brother. Yet there is no end to all his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches. But he never asks, for whom do I toil and deprive myself of good? This also is vanity and a grave misfortune.

Well, there are three tragedies in these eight verses that Solomon mentions that I think are common to us all. One is a lack of comfort. Today they might call it strokes.

A lack of comfort in life. Secondly is a lack of contentment in verses four to six. A certain restlessness characterizes us all.

And finally there's a lack of companionship, which seems to be the problem of many, many people today. And that's in verses seven and eight. Comfort, contentment, companionship.

And he deals with the three tragedies related to this. Now let's start with comfort. And to begin this whole thing, just to get our hearts thinking about it, technically what he does is he shows us the extent of the problem not only among the oppressed people who are really under a heavy burden, but he shows us the extent of the problem also among those who do the oppressing, who've got power.

In one case we've got tears, in the other case we've got power. But the end result is the same. There's no comfort to either one of them.

And that's a great tragedy in life. So no matter whether you're on the bottom end really suffering, going through a special trial or burden or heavy trip in your home or at work, or whether you're the one dishing it out and you seem to be on top of the totem pole, riding high, lots of power, lots of authority, lots of influence, the same thing is true of both people. There's no comfort in the world.

I'd like you to turn to Lamentations, which follows the book of Jeremiah. Lamentations. Jeremiah was called the weeping prophet.

He was crying over the situation in his day, in his culture. People have gone crazy with sin and idolatry. And God had come to Jeremiah and said, Jeremiah, I've had enough.

I'm going to destroy this place and I'm going to wipe Jerusalem out. I'm going to bring Babylon in and I'm going to just level the place. And Jeremiah writes a tremendous prophecy of 52 chapters dealing with that great coming destruction of Babylon and relates it even to some things that are coming in the future in our own generation.

But the conclusion of Jeremiah, and actually in the Hebrew Bible they're part of the same book, is this section we call Lamentations. It's the weepings and the lamenting of a prophet who sees the judgment of God upon his people. Sees people who have decided to go their own way, to live it up, materialism, immorality, idolatry.

It had dominated their lives. And he cries out these Lamentations evaluating the situation. Beginning at chapter 1 of Lamentations.

Look at verse 1. How lonely sits the city that was full of people. How like a widow is she who was great among the nations. The princess among the provinces has become a slave.

She weeps bitterly in the night. Her tears are on her cheeks. Among all her lovers she has none to comfort her.

All her friends have dealt treacherously with her. They have become her enemies. What was true of that city in that hour of crisis is often true of our lives, isn't it? There's no comfort when we need it, when we're going through the hard times and the trials.

People easily forsake you that you once thought were your friends. In verse 9 it says, Her uncleanness is in her skirts. She did not consider her destiny like many of us.

We don't think about God, we're just living it up. Therefore her collapse was awesome. She had no comforter.

Oh Lord behold my affliction for the enemy has magnified himself. No comfort. Look at verse 16.

For these things I weep. My eye, my eye overflows with water because the comforter who should restore my life is far from me. My children are desolate because the enemy prevailed.

Zion spreads out her hands but there's no one to comfort her. You ever wanted it so bad and yet there was no one there? Well we could go on and on in lamentation. Verse 21.

They have heard that I sigh with no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my trouble. They are glad that you have done it.

Bring on the day that you have announced that they may become like me. There is a sense of vengeance on those who had just wiped out Jerusalem. There's no comforter around.

I'd like you to turn back to Job chapter 35. If there ever was a classic example of somebody who was going through the tragedies of life and experiencing this problem, it was Job. There's no comforter.

Yet the Bible speaks about men who came by Job as his comforters. You know people can come by and try to comfort you when you're really hurting and if they're not really dishing it out right, I mean it can hurt a lot more. Job listened to all this stuff that they were dishing out to him and all of his grief.

He had lost his family. His kids are dead. His wife says curse God and die and she forsakes him.

He's got boils all over his body. They're coming by and trying to evaluate why he's having all this trouble. And of course like many people who try to counsel us in times of grief, they say you know your problem is that you're not walking with God.

That's the problem. If you had faith to believe what God can do, you wouldn't be sick. You wouldn't have these problems if you just learned to trust God.

And all this comfort kept coming on. One man said well your problem is Job you don't understand who God is. Another man says your problem is you don't understand who you are.

You are a worm man. You are a duck. You are a dirty rotten depraved sinner.

And that's why this is all coming on you. None of which Job denied. But he took about as much as he could and in chapter 16 verse 2, he said miserable comforters are you all.

Maybe you'd like to say that to a few folks who have been trying to minister to you lately. But look what he says in Job 35 verse 9. Speaking of oppressions in life and heavy trials. Because of the multitude of oppressions they cry out.

They cry out for help because of the arm of the mighty. But no one says where is God my maker who gives songs in the night, who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth and makes us wiser than the birds of heaven. There they cry out but he does not answer.

Because of the pride of evil men. They want comfort. They want answers but they don't get them.

Because of the pride of their own hearts. Back to Ecclesiastes again chapter 4. So as he looks at the extent of the problem, the lack of comfort, he sees it in the oppressed as well as the oppressors. He sees the tears as we have clearly mentioned in verse 1. The tears of the oppressed and he sees the power of the oppressor.

But neither one has a comforter. Psalm 69 20 which is quoted of Jesus in the New Testament says, Reproach has broken my heart and I am full of heaviness. I looked for someone to take pity but there was none.

And for comforters but I found none. How true that is in life. Psalm 119 134 David said, Redeem me from the oppression of man.

And in verse 136 he says, Rivers of water run down my eyes because men do not keep your law. The oppression of man and the attitudes of people in society and often cause broken hearts and the problems at work and the problems in our home. Broken homes, broken marriages, anger, bitterness, hostility, you name it.

Our world is filled with this problem. Tears and power, there is no difference in one issue and that is they have no comforter. I looked for someone to comfort me and there was none.

If you ever wanted that so bad it hurt inside and no one, no one could seemingly relieve that ache. No one could somehow soothe that hurt you felt. You know what Solomon is saying here then.

You know, you feel it, you feel this passage, you know, hey I know what this is all about. No comfort for my soul, how often that is true. And the oppressors who have power, you know, think somehow by all I've gained, all I can do, those who are making it hard on the rest of us, who are using us and manipulating us to somehow get what they want.

They also have the same problem. There is no comforter. Some of the loneliest people in the world are those with power and prestige and influence who think they have it made, who've got all the money they ever wanted in life, but there's no one to comfort their soul.

Solomon speaks of these tragedies out of experience. He had all that man could possibly ever want in life. The Bible speaks often about the seriousness of those oppressors who have power.

It says in Proverbs 14.31 that he who oppresses the poor reproaches his maker. No wonder there's no comfort for their soul. Proverbs 28.16 says a ruler who lacks understanding is a great oppressor.

Proverbs 22.16 says he who oppresses the poor to increase his riches and he who gives to the rich will surely come to poverty. God has strong things to say. Let's take a look at the evaluation of the problem in verse 2 and 3 after showing the extent of it, whether you are the oppressed or whether you are one of the oppressors.

Look at the evaluation he makes. Where are the people who supposedly love and bear your burdens and share with you in time of need? Christians who know that's what the Bible teaches us to do often feel motivated out of obligation and duty to do that rather than out of compassion and the love of Christ and the power of the Spirit. And as a result, even Christian people are left with the same feeling in their heart.

There was no one, no one to comfort my soul. The evaluation of the problem as Solomon sees it, verse 2. Therefore, I praise the dead who were already dead more than the living who are still alive. He said, I look at this problem with no comfort, no relief, no one to really care about you.

He said, we might as well die. It's a lot better than living through all of this. Better yet, he says in verse 3, is the one who has never existed, who has not yet seen the evil work that's done under the sun.

So in his mind, the best thing that could ever happen to you is not to have been born. Isn't that exciting, thrilling, really builds you up today? But frankly, it sometimes takes years for a person to identify with this passage. If you're young here, you probably have experienced some pain in this regard.

But the pain of the years becomes unbearable. And if you've gone a long time, and you've lived your life, and you're no longer after anything, you're just kind of sailing to those retirement years, or you're kind of

just winding down a little bit, or you're kind of looking to a little relief, a little rest, a little peace. I don't know where you are on the ladder, but I'll tell you this.

The longer you live, the more you know that it's more important to have comfort for the soul than it is to achieve all the great things in life. It's more important to have peace and relationships and love and care and compassion than it is to accumulate all that this world can possibly give you. And the longer you live, the more you see it.

And so you can say with Solomon, hey, I know what he's talking about. You might as well not be born if you're talking about comfort. If you're talking about the issue of where we really are, the hurts and the pains and the heartaches of life, it'd be better that you're not born, and to have to face all of that without comfort.

Hey, thank God there's a solution. We'll get to it in a moment. But Job knew what this all was about.

In fact, flip back to chapter 3 again of Job, just to kind of remind ourselves of this problem, just evaluating it. I look at the great men of the Bible, and don't think because you're such a super Christian that you won't ever feel this way. You know, Elijah was a prophet of God, and God did great things in his life, but I read in 1 Kings 19, for him making this statement, Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my father's.

You know, I've read that story many times, and I really wish that in between the lines, God would have said, right on. You haven't said anything new. I'm no better than my father.

I'm going through pain and agony. No one to comfort my soul. How about Jonah, the prophet of God? City repents, and he's out there on the hill, watching all this, and kind of upset that God wasn't going to wipe the city out.

He was looking for a nice, neat, tribulation-type Revelation vision passage, you know, right before his eyes. He thought God would come in and wipe the Assyrians out. He's running through the city, repent.

The day of judgment's coming. Repent! You know, those fools did it. They actually repented.

Now he's sitting out on the hill and says, I don't believe this. After all they've done to us, and God, you're going to let them live? Well, they repented. I don't care.

God has a weed come up. Big gourd plant covers him, because it's hot. And he likes the shade.

That's better. And then the gourd dies. It withers and dies.

He says, thanks a lot. That's what I get. I mean, I can't even get a little plant.

So just take my life. It's not worth living anymore. Everything's going bad.

I mean, you're not killing the Assyrians? And you're not even giving me a plant? And it's hot out here? I quit! And God says, you mean to tell me you don't even care for 120,000 people in that city that can't tell the right hand from the left hand? Obviously referring to the children of that massive city of Nineveh. He didn't even care for the kids, let alone anybody else. See, sometimes we're our own problem.

Job, in Job chapter 3, verse 11, said, Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb? Why did the knees receive me? And why did the breasts that I should nurse? And now I would

have leaned still and been quiet. I would have been asleep. Then I would have been at rest.

You know, if you're really tired, this sounds attractive. You know what I mean? Sack time. Think of it.

Eternal sack time. Not bad. You read down in verse 16, Why was I not hidden like a stillborn child, like infants who never saw light? There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest.

There the prisoners rest together. They do not hear the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there, and the servant is free from his master.

See, Job said the same thing that Solomon did in Ecclesiastes, and maybe you do too. But you know, I got to thinking about this. The sorrow, the tears of the oppressed, the fact that there's no one to comfort.

I got to thinking about how one day God's going to wipe away all tears from our eyes. There'll be no more pain, no sorrow, no heartache. The Bible says they'll hunger no more, they'll thirst no more.

God's going to take it all away. There was no comforter for my soul, Solomon said, so what's the use of living? Back to Ecclesiastes chapter 4. Not only a lack of comfort, but also a lack of contentment, and boy do we see that everywhere. The restlessness in life.

What are people after? Whatever they're after, they're sure going after it rapidly. They're doing all they can to get it, but what are you after? What do you think you're going to get? In Ecclesiastes chapter 4, he said, Again I saw that for all toil and every skillful work, a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Now the source of the problem as to why we lack contentment, and most people do, they're not contented with where they are, they want things to change. Well the source of the problem, he says, is envy or competition. It's the law of the jungle, man.

It's a rat race out there and everybody's out to get you. The New IV, New International Version, says it springs from man's envy of his neighbor. New International says it's the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor.

Envy, competition. Hey, isn't that the American way? Proverbs 14.30 says that envy is rottenness to the bones. Why don't we learn that? We keep going on.

What do we want? We're envying. Charles Bridges in his great commentary on Ecclesiastes says, The better the work, the more is the man hated by those who have no heart to imitate him. Interesting.

The better the work that he does, the more is the man hated by those who have no heart to imitate him. What's the result of all this? Two things. Solomon says vanity and grasping for the wind or emptiness and elusiveness.

There's nothing there. What are you after? It's grasping for the wind. You can't get a hold on anything.

And it's meaningless. It's vanity. You just think it's meaningful.

But you will soon discover that it's not. So Solomon gives a source of the problem. It's envy in the heart.

Jealousy. Wanting more than what we've ever gotten. Jealousy can creep into your heart down there where you work.

And you and I both know it. And the older you get, the more serious it can be. You're just wiser in how to contain it inside of you.

And you watch jobs and opportunities and positions being given to other people and sometimes younger people. You say, I've worked for this company all these years and look at what they're doing to me. Envy, jealousy, competition.

You never achieved in your business what another person in the exact same business did. And they're doing much better and you see them with far less resources and talents and abilities. And you watch them grow and your business is not growing.

And envy and jealousy comes in again. And the summary of all of this, it's vanity and grasping for the wind. What's the solutions to the problem that people come up with? Just look at verse 5 and 6. Really two kinds.

One, we have the apathy of the fool in verse 5. And secondly, we have the attitude of the wise in verse 6. These are the solutions to the problem of lack of contentment and competition and envy and jealousy and suspicion. We read in verse 5, the fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. He just does nothing.

We have those kind of people. They realize there's competition. It's a fight out there.

It's a struggle out there. So they just give up. They fold their hands and literally they consume everything they have.

Consuming the flesh is an old metaphor for starvation. You're going to wind up with nothing by doing nothing. If that's what you're aiming for, you're going to hit it every time.

Nothing. That's the fool. In fact, God says a lot about this.

Turn over to Proverbs. Just back to the book preceding this. Chapter 6. Proverbs chapter 6. Some people look at the hassles of life and they decide to do nothing.

I think there's a lot of Christians who are violating what the Bible teaches about adorning the doctrine of God because you're apathetic and complacent at work. You're doing as little as possible to get by. You have no desire to achieve.

See, there are problems on both sides here. On the one hand, he's telling us that we've got a tragedy in life. That's the envy and competition.

But one solution that is not good is apathy or complacency. You never want to achieve. You're not happy with where you're working so you're just going to float through, man.

Just do what's necessary to get the big paycheck and live for the weekend. That's all your vision. Work to you is an evil, not a good.

And that's what you're going to reap. Whatever you sow, that's what you're going to reap. God is not against.

God is not against working hard. God is not against success. The trouble is, when envy and jealousy enter the heart, then we have real problems.

But the apathy of a fool, God condemns him in no uncertain terms. In chapter 6 of Proverbs, we read in verse 6, Go to the ant, you sluggard. You know, when I read this, I always kind of, I don't know, do you ever straighten your tie or just kind of sit back? I don't know about that, you know.

I mean, God sits there, calls you a sluggard. Couldn't he choose a better word, like, you know, maybe incompetent? That's not too good. What could you say? I mean, lazy? I don't like that one either.

Couldn't you be softer, God? Go to the ant, you sluggard. I mean, I'm offended, right off the bat. Consider her ways and be wise, which having no captain, overseer, or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer and gathers her food in the harvest.

How long will you slumber, oh sluggard? Man. And when will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands, there it is again, to sleep. And so shall your poverty come on you like a robber, and your need like an armed man.

You know, sometimes, I tell you, you can hardly wait to go to bed. You know what I mean? You get so tired, you can't wait to just lay down for a few minutes, man. I mean, sometimes you get so restless, so tired, so worn out, a little sack time, man, would be great.

But there's a lot of people who've been in the sack too long. They're sleeping their life away. And there's an apathy, complacency problem in all this where people don't want to take hassles.

They don't want to take confrontation. They don't want to do this week at work what they know they ought to do. They're just going to cruise it through because they've had it with the hassles.

A little folding of the hands, God says, and your poverty will come on you like an armed robber. God says a lot about it. You can't run away from it.

Look over chapter 24 of Proverbs, verse 30. God talks a lot about the importance of work and staying with the stuff. So He's not encouraging us to be like the fool who folds his hands and says, well, there's so much competition out there.

This private enterprise deal just leads to jealousy and all kinds of manipulation and hypocrisy. I'm going to just back off of it. Proverbs 24, 30 says, I went by the field of the slothful.

God doesn't have very good words to describe us, does He? And by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding. And there it was, all overgrown with thorns. Its surface was covered with nettles.

Its stone wall was broken down. Last time I spoke on this, I was using it in an illustration in another town. A guy gave me a note afterwards and he said, I'm really offended.

You just described my yard. You know, depending on where your yards stand, you get convicted even reading this stuff. And God calls it slothful people.

Verse 32, When I saw it, I considered it well. I looked on it, received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little, there it is again, folding of the hands to rest, so your poverty will come like a prowler and your want like an armed man.

The apathy of a fool. That's no way to go. But the attitude of the wise? Look back at Ecclesiastes again, chapter 4, verse 6. This is an interesting verse to analyze.

How do you handle this problem? There's competition, jealousy, envy out there in the marketplace. Now how do I handle the problem? Solomon says, Better, that's always a key word in Ecclesiastes to tell you he's going to give some sort of solution next. Better is a handful with quietness than both hands full together with toil and grasping for the wind.

That's a wise man's statement. You may look at everybody around you and say, I have truly accomplished great and mighty things. But if you've got toil and turmoil in your heart, if you've got the lack of contentment and peace in your heart, then what good is it? And better is one hand full with quietness of the heart than to have both hands full and be disturbed all the time and never be at rest.

You're going after too much. You see the problem of the overachiever again. You want too much and what you're after is not there.

Better is one hand full with quietness in your heart than to have two hands full but you are troubled and you are grasping for the wind. You are going nowhere even though you think you are. Quietness.

Wow. Turn back to Proverbs 15. Same man wrote both and I think he probably had these passages in mind obviously by the direct statements like folding of the hands which we find in Proverbs and better a little with quietness than much with turmoil.

This is a concept we see frequently by Solomon. In chapter 15 of Proverbs verse 16 he says better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with trouble. How true.

And verse 17 better is a dinner of herbs or vegetables where love is than a fatted calf with hatred. And that's true too. You can have the greatest meal in all the world but if there's hostility, tension, hatred, bitterness, jealousy at the table you can't even enjoy your food.

And God says this frequently over in chapter 16 verse 8 better is a little with righteousness than vast revenues without justice. Again, better. What's better? And chapter 17 verse 1 better is a dry morsel.

I really don't like the bread when it gets dry and crusty and it can break and all that. But it says better is a dry morsel with quietness than a house full of feasting with strife. When I see this sometimes I think of Thanksgiving.

National holiday supposedly to thank God and many homes are filled with tension. The notes and letters that I receive from many people about your Thanksgiving is enough to break a person's heart. And some of us who are Christians we don't know what to do about those occasions.

They've just become family tension times. You don't even want to go. God says better is a dry morsel with quietness than a house full of feasting with strife.

These things we all know are true. Back to Ecclesiastes 4 again. So we have a lack of on the one hand a lack of comfort no one's relieving us inside no one's ministering to our hearts though we keep wanting it and we live in a narcissistic age that's, you know, crying out for this.

I got needs, man, minister to me and everybody's saying the same thing and there's no comforters. And a lack of contentment? Man, it's everywhere in this world. Then it comes to a final problem in verse 7 and 8 another great tragedy and that's a lack of companionship.

It's no fun to be alone. I guess there is differences between being alone and being lonely. We could talk about that.

There certainly is. Sometimes you want to be alone. I mean, you're so hassled with people all the time you've got to get alone.

You've got to have a little quiet time, a little peace. I understand that. But sad the person no matter how much they like their independence and no matter how much they like being alone sad the person who grows later in life and discovers all the pressures and hassles and problems that can inevitably come to a person and be there without anyone to care.

If you don't understand this problem go visit our rest homes and our convalescent hospitals. You talk about loneliness? That's why it's important to build your friendships not only among those in your own family but among those who are Christian friends that you have known and ministered through to the years that in your hour of crisis in your hour of need there will be friends who will care and it will be there. The sad truth is that we see relatively little of this in the world.

Instead we see lonely people everywhere. Songs are sung and often become hit tunes whether they're a song or a piece of music. Whether they're by the young and the rock scene or whether they're by the old of the past generations and past decades.

We hear the same message coming out. The loneliness of life. Where's the true friend? Where's the true companion? And Solomon here in verse 7 and 8 lists I believe at least three problems that we have to face in this matter.

One is the simple problem of loneliness. Verse 8 says there's one alone without companion. He has neither son nor brother.

He's alone. Loneliness. Proverbs 18.1 suggests that sometimes we cause our own problem.

Proverbs 18.1 says a man who isolates himself seeks his own desire and he rages against all wise judgment. Sometimes it's dangerous to want to be alone. Sure, whenever we're with somebody it involves certain obligations and certain responsibilities.

And some people say I want to be alone. I don't have to have the hassles. I don't have to minister to people.

I don't have to bear the burdens. I don't have to hear the stories. My friends, it goes both ways.

It's not easy to develop friendship. Friendship is developed often in the arena of hard times and difficult places. A friendship is something you work on frequently.

It doesn't just come. There's no spiritual hypodermic needle to somehow solve the problem of loneliness that many of us feel right now. I've seen people that are married for years and are lonely as all get out.

Live under the same roof and still so lonely. I've had people write and tell me that. These are problems that we have in society.

Loneliness. Proverbs 27.10 tells us do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend. Have you noticed how we have different friends, parents and kids? Have you noticed that? God's advice to kids don't

ever forsake your father's friends.

It goes on to say don't go to your brother's house meaning a relative in the day of calamity for better is a neighbor or a friend who is nearby than a brother or a relative far away. What an interesting principle that is. Is blood thicker than water? I don't know.

First of all, I never found that verse in the Bible. If your relatives are also Christians who love God and are deep friends of yours you have a choice, blessed thing from God. God bless you.

But there are a lot of us who have found that even relatives can seem so distant and far away. So uncaring. So lacking in compassion and concern.

Some of us will hear that relative word and have a warm, wonderful feeling for it and others will hear it and all we think of is sadness and tragedy and tension and hostility. Better is a friend who is near whether he is a relative or not. Better is somebody that you ministered over a long period of time.

Don't forsake your friend ever and don't forsake your father's friend. The Bible has a lot to say about this and we are going to say more in our next message about friendship. Loneliness, it's a problem to face.

But there is another problem. Look at verse 8 again. It's not just loneliness, it's restlessness.

You might say dissatisfaction. It says, Yet there is no end to all his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches. He's alone, but he keeps on.

What are you after? What are you going for? Why are you staying alone? Why do you not minister to people? Why do you not bear other people's burdens? I want to be alone. I've got things to accomplish in my life. Listen, I'm hitting at the core of what secular society is about and don't think I don't understand it.

Many of you know what I'm talking about too. Right now, there is a mood in this country for independence, singleness, staying away from people, doing your own thing, retreating into our homes with massive multimedia communication equipment phases that will keep us being alone, keep us trapped from ever caring about anybody, much less the person next door. People live in communities today and they have never met their relatives or their neighbors.

They've never even gone to see them. Some people have told me that people in their own direct family they haven't seen in 25, 30 years and don't care to. I see people in neighborhoods that have gotten introduced and said, you know, I've always known, I saw you got in your car, we just haven't met.

How long have you lived here? 35 years. 35 years. It's amazing what's happening to us, but until somebody like me brings it up, we don't even think about it.

We just keep going on, buying the lines of the world, do your own thing, independence, isolation. You know, you can be you. You can do it.

You know, intimidate everybody else and win and succeed and what's happening to us? The older we get, sometimes the smarter we get. Gets more lonely. We get more restless.

We wonder if anybody cares. We're talking about tough stuff here. Loneliness, restlessness.

There's one more thing though. Another problem in the lack of companionship that you must face and that's meaninglessness. Verse 8 says, For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good? Whom am I doing this for and why? And Solomon says, This is also vanity and a grave misfortune.

Psalms 39:6 says, Surely every man walks about like a shadow. Surely they busy themselves in vain. He heaps up riches and he does not know who will gather them.

The psalmist answers, And now Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you. So many of us do not have our hope in the Lord and if we're trying to walk it alone and you talk about a problem of companionship, for whom am I doing all of this? And then one of the real tragedies is some guys think they're doing it for their wives and their families and one day they discover that the families and the wife never saw it that way. I've been doing all this for you.

Hey, we want you, not your things. And so many of us are living life in a fast lane, in a rat race culture, a law of the jungle, survival of the fittest and I gotta face it all week long. The point to learn, the end of verse 8, what is the point to learn? He said, This is vanity and a grave misfortune.

Two things he's telling us that such a life lacks meaning. It's vanity, emptiness. It lacks meaning.

Sir, ma'am, listen. If everything I've been telling you, describing you, your life is lacking meaning. What are you doing it for? What are you after? What are you trying to achieve? And secondly, when he said a grave misfortune, he's saying that such a life brings misery.

Paul said, If only in this life we have hope, we are of all men most miserable or most to be pitied. Well, what's the answer to all of this? Lack of comfort, lack of contentment, lack of companionship. And I like what Jerome, who translated the Bible's original language of Greek into Latin, into the Latin Vulgate, which was a standard edition for the Roman Catholic Church for many years.

Jerome wrote in the 4th century, after this passage, here's his word. He said, What is missing is Jesus. I love that.

Just captured by the tragedies of life, a lack of comfort, a lack of contentment, a lack of companionship. I'm all alone. What's missing? What's missing is the Lord, friend.

That's what's missing. He's the answer to comfort. Blessed be the God of all comfort, the Father of mercies, who's comforting us in all of our tribulation.

Contentment, the psalmist wrote, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Perfect peace. Companionship, there's a friend that sticks closer than a brother.

A friend who the Bible calls a friend of sinners. Someone who loves you even though he knows what you're like. He's the friend of all friends.

What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. Jesus we're talking about.

Jesus is all the world to me. My life, my joy, and my all. What are you after? We're talking here about the most important thing in life.

I want you to reach out to Jesus today. He's your friend. He's your companion.

He's the one who knows your needs before you ask Him. He'll minister to your heart in a way that even some Christians ignore. Though they know Him and love Him, they forget that He is the one who's always there.

He'll never leave us nor forsake us. The Bible speaks of His aching heart wanting to fellowship. Sometimes wanting to throw His arms around us.

And so often we ignore and neglect Him in our lives. Jesus is the one missing in all this passage. A relationship with Him will bring you what you are looking for.

He calls Himself a comforter. He calls the Holy Spirit a comforter. He tells us about all the wonderful things He's doing for us to relieve our burdens.

He invites us to cast our burdens on Him and He will sustain us. Cast all of your anxiety on Me. He invites us to do that.

You talk about comfort? The Lord is our comfort. He is our strength. And contentment? Hey, when you know Him and know all that He is, and all that He does, and all He's going to do.

No more is that restlessness and dissatisfaction there when you focus on Him. You say, having Jesus, I've got all I need. All I need.

I don't need anything else. You and God make a majority. And because of His wonderful presence in your life, you'll begin to minister to others.

He is a companion that no one else is like. He's one who's always there. Who cares about me even when I'm sinning and I'm rebellious and my attitudes aren't right.

He loves me. He's forgiving. What a friend.

A friend that sticks closer than a brother. How we need Jesus. I hope you know Him.

Father, thank you so much that in spite of the great tragedies of life, there is one who can meet them all and remove the hurt and relieve the sorrow, take away the tension, all the envy and the strife. One who gives peace, peace not like the world gives, who just wants the cessation of trouble but He gives us peace even in the midst of a storm. You've said, let not your heart be troubled.

You believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many dwelling places.

If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am, there you may be also. God, we thank you for your wonderful promises.

You tell us you'll wipe away every tear from our eyes. There will be no more pain or suffering or death or sorrow or sickness. You are the God of all comfort.

You know what we're going through right now. You know how many hurts are in this audience right now, things that we're feeling inside that the person to the right or the left doesn't know anything about. But you do and you've invited us to cast that burden on you.

You are such a sympathetic Savior. You tell us you understand all of our weaknesses and you know all of our sins. You are a merciful and faithful high priest able to succor or to comfort those who are troubled.

We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

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