

**Message #13****Ecclesiastes 4:4-12**

The Hebrew word “labor” means he took a look at every kind of work men do that brings them to the point of becoming weary (Gesenius, p. 639). The Hebrew word “skill” is one that refers to one’s work, one’s business, one’s occupation (*Ibid.*, p. 497). Combined, these two words mean that Solomon took a careful look at every kind of job man works hard at.

**WITHOUT GOD BEING AT THE CENTER OF ONE’S LIFE, THE MOTIVATION FOR WORKING AND ACHIEVING WILL NOT BRING ONE TO FULFILLMENT AND MEANING.**

Solomon took a look at the motives for men working apart from God and he discovered it was all empty under the sun.

**MOTIVE #1** – The man who works motivated by rivalry will be empty. **4:4**

R. N. Whybray, in his commentary on these verses, called this “entrepreneurial rivalries” (p. 274).

Every skill, every job motivated by competition or rivalry will leave one empty. The word “rivalry” is the Hebrew word for jealousy. Specifically, an envy that is excited by the prosperity of others, which causes a zeal or anger or indignation (Gesenius, p. 735). There are some people who cannot stand it if someone else succeeds. Motivated by jealousy, they will work as hard as possible to try and outperform the one they are jealous of.

But if it is competition or rivalry that motivates you to work, then you will discover you will be empty in your work. You’ll try and beat this competitor or that competitor and if you do, you still won’t be happy.

It is far better to be motivated by something other than rivalry. If competition is all you work for, you will not find any meaning or fulfillment.

**MOTIVE #2** – The man who doesn’t work motivated by laziness will be empty. **4:5**

The O.T. image portrayed by “folding hands” is one of not working because one is lazy (Proverbs 6:9-11; 24:32-34). The man who folds his hands is a man who does nothing to provide for himself. Notice this verse calls such a man a fool.

The difficulty of this verse is what is meant by he “consumes his own flesh?” There have been three views as to what that means:

- 1) Some suggest it means that fools refuse to work and still have enough to eat, even though they didn’t earn it.

- 2) Some suggest it means fools refuse to work and are so lazy that they will eventually starve themselves.
- 3) Some suggest it means fools refuse to work and eventually consume everything he has.

Happiness cannot ever be found in laziness.

**MOTIVE #3** – The man who is moderate is better but still empty. **4:6**

It is better in life to work to the point where one hand has enough so you can live a quiet life rather than working until two handfuls have been acquired.

If Solomon had to choose from among his “under the sun” options, his choice would be to work hard enough so you can rest a little rather than drive after two fists full. One work perspective is better than another, but it will still leave you empty. Fulfillment, meaning and contentment can only be found in work when God is at the center of life.

**MOTIVE #4** – The man who is the independent achiever will be empty. **4:8**

He is single, self-driven and independent. He is a workaholic, who, for the whole sake of labor and bottom line prosperity, pours himself into his work. He is disciplined, he is successful and he is empty.

Truth is if you prosper and achieve and don't enjoy sharing that with others, it is a very lonely existence.

Companies who hoard have CEO's who are miserable. They look at bottom-lines, they look at profit margin and they don't care about human beings and they are miserable. Such people are really lonely and as one reporter recently said, such people actually live in their own jail.

There is nothing wrong with hard work. There is nothing wrong with being disciplined; in fact, that is the mark of wisdom. There is nothing wrong with working hard to succeed. But if God is not at the center of your life, it will all leave you empty. It will be an effort in futility “under the sun.”

**Illustration #1** - Because if one falls the other can lift him up. **4:10**

A good partner in business can be a real asset. If one of the partners gets in trouble, the other can help him out.

A good partner can help you keep things in proper perspective. A good partner can ease some of the load and make the business much more stable and successful. Part of the responsibility of a good partner is to help the other one when he is in trouble. It is better to be in business with someone than to be in business alone.

**Illustration #2** - Because if one is freezing the other can keep him warm. **4:11**

The business world is cold and calloused. A good partner can help keep the other from becoming cold and calloused. When you are a bottom-line oriented executive of your own company, you can begin to lose touch with the real world and real people. Therefore, a good partner can be a real asset to you. For a good partner can keep you warm and sensitive.

**Illustration #3** - Because if one is attacked by an enemy the other can help. **4:12**

It is a wonderful thing to have a partner who will stand right by your side in danger and war. It is also a rare thing to have a partner who will stand by your side in danger and war.

Now of course the best partner one can have in life is Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ is at the center of one's life, life can be a wonderful, exciting and fulfilling journey. But without God at the center, it is lonely, like chasing the wind.