**Ecclesiastes 4-6**

Oppression, Toil, Friendlessness

**4**Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun:

I saw the tears of the oppressed—
    and they have no comforter;
power was on the side of their oppressors—
    and they have no comforter.
**2**And I declared that the dead,
    who had already died,
are happier than the living,
    who are still alive.
**3**But better than both
    is the one who has never been born,
who has not seen the evil
    that is done under the sun.

**4**And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person’s envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

**5**Fools fold their hands
    and ruin themselves.
**6**Better one handful with tranquility
    than two handfuls with toil
    and chasing after the wind.

**7**Again I saw something meaningless under the sun:

**8**There was a man all alone;
    he had neither son nor brother.
There was no end to his toil,
    yet his eyes were not content with his wealth.
“For whom am I toiling,” he asked,
    “and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?”
This too is meaningless—
    a miserable business!

**9**Two are better than one,
    because they have a good return for their labor:
**10**If either of them falls down,
    one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls
    and has no one to help them up.
**11**Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
    But how can one keep warm alone?
**12**Though one may be overpowered,
    two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Advancement Is Meaningless

**13**Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning. **14**The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. **15**I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king’s successor. **16**There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Fulfill Your Vow to God

**5**Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.

**2**Do not be quick with your mouth,
    do not be hasty in your heart
    to utter anything before God.
God is in heaven
    and you are on earth,
    so let your words be few.
**3**A dream comes when there are many cares,
    and many words mark the speech of a fool.

**4**When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. **5**It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. **6**Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, “My vow was a mistake.” Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? **7**Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore fear God.

Riches Are Meaningless

**8**If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. **9**The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.

**10**Whoever loves money never has enough;
    whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.
    This too is meaningless.

**11**As goods increase,
    so do those who consume them.
And what benefit are they to the owners
    except to feast their eyes on them?

**12**The sleep of a laborer is sweet,
    whether they eat little or much,
but as for the rich, their abundance
    permits them no sleep.

**13**I have seen a grievous evil under the sun:

wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners,
**14**    or wealth lost through some misfortune,
so that when they have children
    there is nothing left for them to inherit.
**15**Everyone comes naked from their mother’s womb,
    and as everyone comes, so they depart.
They take nothing from their toil
    that they can carry in their hands.

**16**This too is a grievous evil:

As everyone comes, so they depart,
    and what do they gain,
    since they toil for the wind?
**17**All their days they eat in darkness,
    with great frustration, affliction and anger.

**18**This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them - for this is their lot. **19**Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil - this is a gift of God. **20**They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.

**6**I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind:**2**God gives some people wealth, possessions and honor, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.

**3**A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. **4**It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. **5**Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man -  **6**even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?

**7**Everyone’s toil is for their mouth,
    yet their appetite is never satisfied.
**8**What advantage have the wise over fools?
What do the poor gain
    by knowing how to conduct themselves before others?
**9**Better what the eye sees
    than the roving of the appetite.
This too is meaningless,
    a chasing after the wind.

**10**Whatever exists has already been named,
    and what humanity is has been known;
no one can contend
    with someone who is stronger.
**11**The more the words,
    the less the meaning,
    and how does that profit anyone?

**12**For who knows what is good for a person in life, during the few and meaningless days they pass through like a shadow? Who can tell them what will happen under the sun after they are gone?