

Vanity: Week 4 Discussion Questions

Read Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

1. Verses 1-3 of this text reflect on the reality of oppression in our world. It is something that affects all of us. What's amazing is that while the author argues that it is better not to be born at all so that we don't have to face the oppression in our world, Jesus was actually born for the purpose of enduring and overcoming oppression in all its forms, beginning with the oppression of sin. The Preacher reflects on the bleakness of our situation apart from God's gracious invention; Jesus enters in and addresses the situation.

a. Where do you see oppression in your own life? Where might you be a victim? Where might you be an oppressor (one who uses their power or influence for your own benefit to the detriment of others)?

b. How does Jesus' enduring oppression deal with the oppression we face with personally? In other words, how does Jesus' suffering and death at the hand of his oppressors actually bring us hope and freedom from the oppression we are dealing with?

c. What can we learn from Jesus' example about how we ought to respond to oppression in our lives? How about oppression in the lives of others?

2. The next portion of our text reflects on work. There is one person who works hard because they are jealous and greedy. The other person just indulges himself or herself to death. The Preacher advocates for a life of contentment and quietness.

a. Which person are you most tempted to be like, the greedy workaholic or the indulgent sluggard?

b. What would it look like to live a life of quietness and simplicity in today's world?

c. How is God teaching you to address this issue in your life?

3. The Preacher then considers life in community versus solitude. He warns us of the dangers and irrationality of living in isolation.

- a. Why are some of us tempted to isolate ourselves or not to prioritize relationships?
- b. How does Jesus' life teach us about the value of community and what it looks like?
- c. Who is there in your life to support you and defend you? Who can count on you to support and defend them?
- d. What is an area of your life where need the support of others? How are you currently functioning as a support for others?
- e. How are you investing in and strengthening these relationships?

4. Finally, the Preacher bemoans the fact that while there is some advantage to being wise instead of foolish, in the end both people experience the same kinds of things (e.g. falling out of favor with the people you lead).

- a. In what spheres of life has God called you to be a leader or influencer?
- b. In this passage, what is the main characteristic that separates the foolish, old king from the wise, poor youth?
- c. How is God teaching you to remain humble and wise as you seek to lead these areas?
- d. Jesus was the greatest leadership example we have ever had. How would you characterize his leadership?
- e. How are we to deal with seasons when those people we are called to lead (e.g. children, co-workers, ministry partners, etc.) don't want us to lead them?
- f. How can we know whether it is our fault because we are not loving and serving them well as leaders, or the fault is on their side?