

# Ecclesiastes 4:7-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-4/ecclesiastes-47-8/>

*With so much oppression and rivalry, perhaps it is better to do life alone. But, alas, this too is vaporous.*

Solomon looks *again* at the *vanity* (hebel, [see our commentary for Ecclesiastes 1:2](#)) of life *under the sun*. Solomon uses a new literary device, telling a story.

It is about a man with no *dependent*, or *son*, or *brother*. Yet *there was no end to all his labor*. He works as though he were supporting a whole tribe because his *eyes were not satisfied with riches*.

The word translated *dependent* is sheniy, which means *second*. It might be properly translated as “partner” or “another.” It could refer to a wife. Sheniy is the word used in [Genesis 1:8](#) to describe the *second* day of creation and in [Genesis 4:19](#) to describe Lamech’s “additional” wife. So, it is not only a *dependent* in terms of an heir. This man is deprived of community, togetherness. He has no one to share life with. No *son* or *brother*.

Even so, the man is driven to gather wealth. He lacks contentment no matter how much he accumulates. He can’t gain enough riches. There is *no end to his labor*. He gains great *riches*, but *his eyes are not satisfied* with what he has accumulated. He wants more. But to what end? The man *never* asks the question, “*And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?*”

The word for *pleasure* is towb, which is often translated “good.” It is used in [Genesis 1:4](#), “God saw that the light was good (towb)” and throughout [Genesis 1](#) it is towb that is used to describe God’s assessment of creation. So, it is not just frivolous pleasure Solomon is referring to. He states that the workaholic never asks, “*Why am I depriving myself of enjoying life?*”

Solomon concludes this story of the lonely man by reminding us that the situation of this *certain man* is hebel, *vanity*. And he adds a new companion to his standard assessment. He refers to this as a *grievous task*. The word for task is inyan, a general *occupation* or affair. So it is not just a moment or event. A life dedicated to material accumulation is a life that is *grievous*.

**Biblical Text:**

**<sup>7</sup>Then I looked again at vanity under the sun.<sup>8</sup> There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches *and he never asked*, “And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?” This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.**