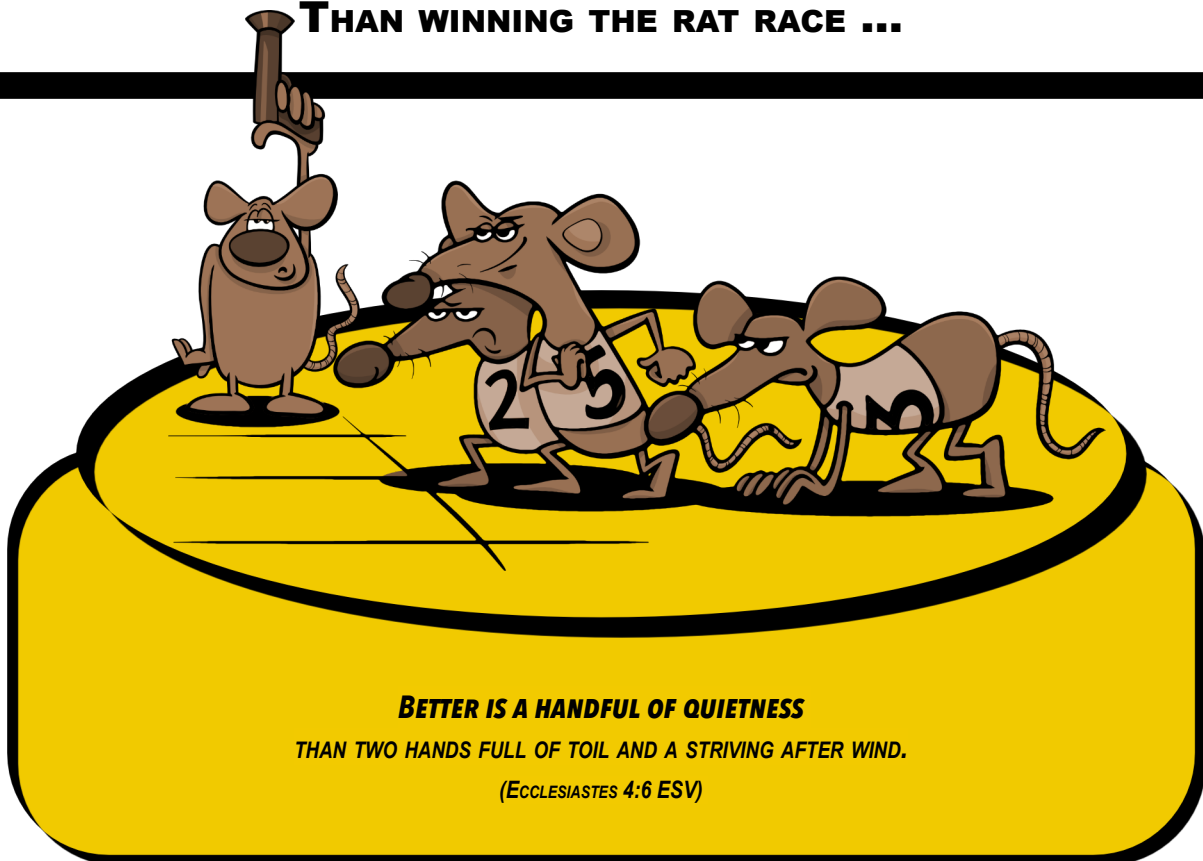




BETTER ... IS A HANDFUL OF QUIETNESS

THAN WINNING THE RAT RACE ...



OUTLINE ... (Ecclesiastes 4:4-16 ESV)

1. Overcoming the allure of the rat race and finding our handful of quietness means doing a deep dive into our motivation, 4:4.

- (Ecclesiastes 4:4 ESV) Then I saw that **all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor**. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

Envy robs its victims of quietness of heart and mind and produces desperation that drives people to grasp for life by their own effort instead of receiving life by the grace of God.

THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY OUT. Only the word of God by the Spirit of God are we able to be rescued from this powerful, sinful motivation.

- **HERE IS THAT WAY OUT ...**
 - a. Understand/accept that envy and jealousy are works of the sinful flesh in life under the sun.
 - (Galatians 5:19-21 ESV) **Now the works of the flesh are evident** ... enmity, strife, **jealousy**, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, **envy** ...
 - b. Understand/accept that the only way to overcome works of the flesh is by walking by the Spirit.
 - (Galatians 5:16 ESV) But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.
 - c. Understand/accept that our good intentions are no match against our sinful nature
 - (Galatians 5:17 NLT) **The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants**. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. **These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions**.
 - d. Understand/accept that our key strategy to overcoming envy of our neighbor is to be led by the Spirit to love our neighbor.

The Progression:

- >>> Love our neighbor, lay down our lives for them.
- >>> Moves us away from envying and competing with our neighbor.
- >>> The Holy Spirit cleanses our lives of envy.

- (1 John 3:16 ESV) By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, **and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers**.

Loving our neighbor is the antithesis of (and the remedy for) the natural, destructive, competitive nature that is as common and acceptable in the church as it is in the world.

- e. If we use our freedom to through love serve our neighbor, we will defeat our sinful tendency of competition which leads to *"biting and devouring."*
 - (Galatians 5:13-15 ESV) For you were called to freedom, brothers. **Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another**. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 **But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another**.
- f. The same strategy allows us to defeat our sinful tendencies of conceit and jealousy.
 - (Galatians 5:26 NLT) **Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another**.

2. Overcoming the allure of the rat race and finding our handful of quietness does not mean dropping out of the rat race, 4:5.

- a. Not working is a foolish alternative to overworking.
 - (Ecclesiastes 4:5 NLT) **Fools fold their idle hands, leading them to ruin**.
- b. Dropping out of life is the choice of a fool—someone who is self-destructive and self-deluded.
 - (Proverbs 26:16 NLT) **Lazy people consider themselves smarter than seven wise counselors**.

3. Overcoming the allure of the rat race and finding our handful of quietness means understanding that quietness is a gift and not an achievement, 4:6.

- (Ecclesiastes 4:6 ESV) Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.
- a. The blessing of quietness is a gift of common grace relevant to both saved and unsaved people.
 - (Matthew 5:45 NLT) In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. **For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike**.

Common grace, as an expression of the goodness of God, is every favor, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God; this includes the delay of wrath, the mitigation of our sin-natures, natural events that lead to prosperity, and all gifts that human use and enjoy naturally. [The Goodness of God and Common Grace—An Essay By Sam Storms –The Gospel Coalition]

Quietness ... the Hebrew word is [nachath /nakh-ath/] and is translated as rest, set on, quietness, lighting down and settle. The word means rest and quietness; a quiet attitude; to go down, descend; to come down into.

The best way I can describe this word is that this quietness is when the Spirit of God settles on us, descends on us and comes to us in a way that brings complete rest and peace and quietness.

- (Isaiah 30:15a ESV) For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, “In returning and **rest** you shall be saved; **in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.**”
 - (Galatians 5:22–23 ESV) **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.**
- b. Two hands full of human toil and achievement are two hands empty of anything meaningful.
- c. The blessing of quietness for believers is God’s work of righteousness that results in the ultimate gift of God’s quietness and peace abounding in our lives.
- (Isaiah 32:17 ESV) **And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.**

Summary: God certainly blesses unbelievers with a measure of peace and quietness in their lives under the sun. But the person who is saved by God’s grace will be introduced to peace and quietness that exceed human comprehension and protect our innermost being.

- (Philippians 4:7 NLT) **Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.**
- d. The things that God gives—quietness, peace, etc.—are without exception better than the things we achieve.
- (Proverbs 15:16 NLT) **Better to have little, with fear for the LORD,** than to have great treasure and inner turmoil.
 - (Proverbs 17:1 ESV) **Better is a dry morsel**

with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.

- e. If a person finds quietness and peace—saved and unsaved alike—it is always the gift of God because these things are impossible to achieve by human effort alone.

4. A working knowledge of the “better” principle in Scripture will help us to understand these things.

- a. The basis of the better principle is a simple contrast stating that “*this is better than that.*”
- b. Example: Applying the basics of the “better principle” to Ecclesiastes 4:6.
- (Ecclesiastes 4:6 ESV) **Better is** a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

Observation: One handful of quietness **is better** than two hands full of laboring and chasing what is not there and so cannot be caught.

Observation: This is **not saying** that hard work is in itself bad or meaningless. Working hard is very good if our motivation is pure.

Observation: This is **not saying** that one handful of quietness is best. If God so blesses us, then two hands full of quietness would be better than one handful, but we cannot add to God’s blessing of quietness with human effort and hard work.

5. We do not find quietness by running in the “under the sun” races of this world but by running with endurance the race God sets before us.

- (Hebrews 12:1–2 ESV) Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, **and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,** 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
- a. Fighting the good fight and finishing God’s race go hand-in-hand.
- (2 Timothy 4:7 ESV) **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**
- b. Fighting our own personal battles goes hand-in-hand with the rat race of life under the sun.

6. Surviving the rat race and finding our handful of quietness means avoiding the dissatisfying promise of riches, 4:7-8.

- (Ecclesiastes 4:7–8 ESV) Again, I saw vanity under the sun: 8 one person who has no other, either son or brother, **yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches**, so that he never asks, “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?” **This also is vanity and an unhappy business.**

The person who seeks satisfaction in the things of this world will never be satisfied because the things of this world were never intended to satisfy the deepest longings of God’s human creation. And tragically he is so absorbed in finding satisfaction in riches that he never truly examines asks why.

- (Proverbs 19:23a ESV) **The fear of the LORD leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied.**
- (Psalm 90:14 NLT) **Satisfy us each morning with your unfailing love**, so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives.
- (Psalm 107:8–9 ESV) Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! 9 **For he satisfies the longing soul**, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.
- (Psalm 145:16 ESV) You open your hand; **you satisfy the desire of every living thing.**

7. Two are better than one in overcoming the rat race and pursuing quietness, 4:9-12.

- (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 ESV) **Two are better than one**, because they have a good reward for their toil. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! 11 Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? 12 And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.
- a. Two are better than one in finding reward and success under the sun.

- b. But because two are better than one does not mean that one cannot find reward and success.

8. Crucial to surviving the rat race and finding quietness is following wise, skilled leaders, 4:13-16.

- (Ecclesiastes 4:13–16 ESV) **Better** was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice. 14 For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. 15 I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king’s place. 16 There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. **Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.**
- a. We must determine to be thoughtful and wise in our decisions as to whom we will follow.
- b. Neither poverty nor riches are the basis for good leadership skills.
- c. We must look for leaders who retain the ability of knowing how to take advice.
- d. We must not assume good leadership because of previous high position, e.g. that of a king.
- e. We must not be fickle in our choice of leaders.

Fickle ... changing frequently, especially as regards one's loyalties, interests, or affection; marked by lack of steadfastness, constancy, or stability; likely to change your opinion or your feelings suddenly and without a good reason.

- (Exodus 32:1 ESV) When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. **As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.**”
- (Numbers 14:3–4 ESV) Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. **Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” 4 And they said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”**