

LIVING ON THE RAGGED EDGE: COMING TO TERMS WITH REALITY

THE LONELY WHINE OF THE TOP DOG

ECCLESIASTES 4:1-8



The Heart of the Matter

We are inundated with books, seminars, educational courses, and motivational speeches on the subject of top-level management and success-oriented leadership. The hype has never been greater nor the lure more effective. It is easy to get the impression that once one achieves such an impressive status, satisfaction and a great, liberating sense of pleasure are discovered . . . much like the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The long-awaited dream, however, is more often than not a distress-ridden nightmare. Instead of finding relief and companionship, the chief executive officer has a head-on collision with anxiety, pressure, jealousy, politics, ruthless decisions, economic headaches, and inescapable loneliness. Solomon said it all centuries ago. His words live on. May we hear them well and heed their cry. Those who fail to do so are identified in Scripture as fools.



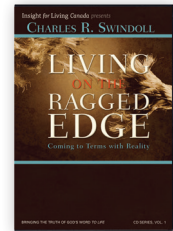
Discovering the Way

1. A Realistic View from the Top (Ecclesiastes 4:1-8)

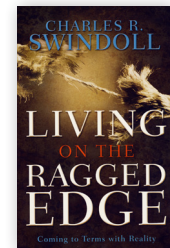
As Solomon sensed the invisible pyramids of power, he saw people who had reached the top and those below who were still clawing their way up. He observed military officers, political leaders, and the other “top dogs” of his day, then recorded what he found. Solomon discovered that oppressive conditions lead to despair, that competitive determination leads to burnout, and that compulsive drive leads to disillusionment. This is what life “under the sun” looks like—life apart from the healthy balance and holy perspective infused by a relationship with God.



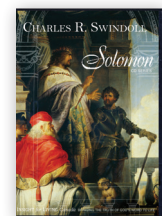
Tools for Digging Deeper



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2. A Penetrating Example from the Lord (Luke 12:15–21)

In Luke 12:15–21, Jesus told a parable that illustrates the tragedy and futility of workaholicism as a means of finding satisfaction for what are really spiritual needs. As you look at this passage, note the workaholic tendencies of the main character. He was already rich (Luke 12:16). He took on extra projects to maintain his excess (12:18). His plans pointed to enjoyment in the future rather than contentment in the present (12:19). He was focused on earthly treasures instead of heavenly treasures (12:21).

Material gain will never satisfy our spiritual hunger. Neither will power, prestige, nor success. If we pursue these things with the passion of a workaholic, we might gain the world for a time, but we could forfeit blessings in eternity (Matthew 16:26).



DIGGING DEEPER
God's Warning about Priorities

What do the following passages say about priorities?

	Priorities
Matthew 6:24	
Matthew 6:31–33	
Philippians 2:3–4	
1 Peter 4:8	

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Starting Your Journey

Solomon's observations leave Christians with two transforming truths and two haunting questions:

- Possessions ought to satisfy, but they *never* will!

- Priorities ought to come automatically, but they *never* will!

Are you telling yourself the truth about possessions? Are you hearing God's warning about priorities?