

## **TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE** **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**

ECCLESIASTES is the sad sequel to the book of PROVERBS. Proverbs primarily consists of wise sayings Solomon taught his children to live godly and peaceful lives. But in Ecclesiastes, Solomon laments that he has played the fool and failed to take his own advice. Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 reads, “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king of Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” Ecclesiastes is a sermon that warns us not to waste our lives on worthless things. And it exhorts us to live with godly values, eternal significance, and spiritual priorities. Our text is a part of Solomon’s instructions for living a meaningful life. In Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Solomon teaches us to live a life that counts and you must learn to value relationships over possessions. You must value people more than things. You must find joy in fellowship not pleasure. Solomon makes this point in a simple, clear, and direct statement: “Two are better than one.”

This text stands in stark contrast to its surround passages. Verses 7-8 warns that selfish isolation from others is vanity. Verses 13-16 warns that superficial fame is vanity. Between these extremes, our text teaches a practical principle for a meaningful life: two are better than one. There are times when one is hurt, betrayed, or forsaken by another. But Solomon does not even acknowledge these obvious contradictions to his stated principle. He simply declares the point and allows it to stand on its own: two are better than one. This is a countercultural principle in a society that celebrates the power of one. And many people virtually worship privacy. But scripture does not join us in the exaltation of the individual. Proverbs 18:1 says: “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.” Isolation from others is selfish, foolish, and ungodly. In creation, the first thing God said was not “good” was the fact that the man was alone. God created us for community. True faith is always lived out in a community with other believers. Scripture does not teach the power of one. It teaches that two are better than one. Solomon gives four reasons why two are better than one.

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### **I. TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE WHEN YOU ARE AT WORK.**

Ecclesiastes 10:10 reads, “If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.” The point of this verse is work smarter, not harder. Our text gives a simple way to work smarter: don’t work alone. Verse 9 says: “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.” The word toil speaks of hard work and diligent labor. This is not the picture of a person sitting in a cubicle, goofing off, wasting time, doing nothing. It is not a person who is working hard to not do any actual work until they get off. The term describes an agricultural worker in the field. He works hard, because there will be no harvest if he does not toil in the field. He doesn’t need to be prodded to work. He knows that if he doesn’t labor, his family will starve. This reminds us that cultivating a meaningful life is hard work.

- **Establishing a good character is hard work.**
- **Getting an education is hard work.**
- **Building a successful career is hard work.**
- **Nurturing a godly marriage is hard work.**
- **Raising responsible children is hard work.**
- **Doing the work of ministry is hard work.**
- **Sharing your faith with others is hard work.**

The assumption of the text is that a meaningful life is hard work. But the affirmation of the text is that you can accomplish more when you work together with others. The late novelist, ALEX HALEY, had a picture in his office of a turtle sitting on a fence. When someone would ask him about it, he would explain that if you ever see a turtle sitting on a fence, you know it had some help getting up there. And when he would begin to think about how marvelous he was, he would look at this picture and remind himself how he got to where he was. And when you see someone who has accomplished something significant in life, know that they did not get there by themselves. They had some help. And Solomon declares that two are better than one when you go to work.

1 Corinthians 3:5-8 says: "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor." Notice that even though the one who waters and the one who plants are one, each individual will receive his own reward. In other words, the fact that you work with others does not diminish your personal reward from God. The one who plants will be rewarded for planting. And the one who waters will be rewarded for watering. However, they will receive an even greater reward because they work together.

Genesis 11:1-9 records the story of the first skyscraper, which was never completed. After the flood, God commanded the people to spread out and replenish the earth. But in prideful rebellion and sinful unbelief, they decided to stay together and build a tower that would reach into the heavens. And the Lord came down personally to put an end to it, declaring that nothing would be impossible to them because they worked together. The suggestion is that even the wrong plan can accomplish much when people work together. How much more is that so when the church gets together to do the will and work of God. Two are better than one when you go to work, for you get a greater reward for your labor.

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## **II. TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE WHEN YOU FALL DOWN.**

Verse 9 makes the point that two are better than one with the picture of a laborer in the field. But verses 10-12 make the point with the picture of a traveler on the road. Verse 10 addresses a common threat that every person who stands and puts one foot after another faces: you may fall down. You would think that Solomon would have written this as definite reality: "When they fall..." Instead, he simply speaks of it as a possible scenario: "if they fall..." But his wording does not diminish

the gravity of the statement in any way. It makes the facts all the more difficult to avoid. You may fall down.

- **No matter how experienced you are at walking; you still may fall.**
- **No matter how skilled you are at walking; you still may fall.**
- **No matter how careful you are at walking; you still may fall.**

1 Corinthians 10:12 warns, “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” The person who thinks he or she is exempt from falling is actually the leading candidate for a fall. Mark it down: You are prone to fall sometimes along life’s journey. Note that verse 10 does not specify how one falls. He doesn’t say you may fall if you are not careful how you walk or if you walk in the slippery places or if an enemy pushes you down. The text simply says that along life’s journey, you may fall. That is, you are not exempt from failures in life. All of us will fail at some time or another. And the news goes from bad to worse. You can fall so low or so hard that you cannot get up on your own. This is not just a slip or stumble. It is a total collapse. There are some failures, mistakes, and errors in life that you cannot recover from on your own.

Galatians 6:1 says, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” Within the believing community of born-again followers of Christ, some may be overtaken by a sinful trespass. Even the mature Christian can fall into gross sin. But how should the church respond? Paul says the sinning brother should be restored. The church should not be a place that kicks people when they are down. It ought to be a place that picks fallen people up, puts them back on their feet, and helps them to get on the right track again. We ought to be in the business of restoration – not amputation. But there is a specific group who should do the restoring: Galatians 6:1 says: “you who are spiritual.” The clear implication is that there are some brothers and sisters in the church who are not spiritual. That is, some of us are led by our sinful inclinations, rather than the Holy Spirit. And when someone is caught in a trespass, we ought to put up yellow-caution tape around the scene to keep unspiritual brethren away. But the spiritual brothers and spiritual ought to restore the fallen with gentleness.

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Again, verse 10 says: “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!” This is prophetic terminology. In Scripture, God blesses people by saying, “Blessed be the man...” And God curses people by saying, “Woe unto the man...” Ecclesiastes is poetry, not prophesy. But Solomon uses this prophetic terminology to emphasize the importance of spiritual partnership during time of failure. Verse 10 says, “But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” Solomon says you are doomed if you are alone when you fall and have no one to pick you up. This statement reveals why some fallen people never make it up again: they are alone when they fall. CHARLES SWINDOLL said it well:” Friendships must be cultivated. They don’t automatically occur when calamity strikes. And I have never heard of a rent-a-friend business either.” You cannot be determined to walk alone and expect

everyone to come running to help you when you fall. You need to cultivate friendships while you are on your feet.

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### **III. TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE WHEN YOU ARE IN THE COLD.**

Many commentators naturally apply this principle – two are better than one – to marriage. And they are sure that this text is speaking of marriage when they read verse 11: “Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?” To keep the text from suggesting something illicit, commentators quickly conclude that this verse is about a married couple. But there is no reference to marriage in this passage. And you don’t need to protect the Bible. Just let it speak for itself. This is the picture of a traveler on a journey. As he walks the road, night catches up with him. And the path gets dark and cold. He has to find a place to bed down for the night. But he is too far from the nearest inn. Or there may be no room in the inn. Or he may be in a desolate area where there are no homes to offer hospitality. So he has to sleep in the elements. Sure, he has a cloak and tunic. But it is so cold that they are not enough to keep him warm throughout the night. He thus finds himself in a situation where the elements put his life in jeopardy.

If the picture of verse 10 addresses the danger of falling; verse 11 addresses the danger of freezing. The point is that life will sometimes leave you in the cold. Let me say it another way. Verse 9 says that you need fellowship to succeed in your work. Verse 10 says you need fellowship to stand again when you fall. But verse 11 says that you need fellowship to survive when you are in the cold. There are times when you will be pushed out or pushed aside. You can be on the right road and still find yourself in a situation that is so severe that you cannot survive it on your own. Mark it down: You are not exempt from times of suffering, rejection, or disappointment. And you will need others who will warm you up when life leaves you in the cold. You will need the friendship, support, encouragement, intercession, and generosity of others to warm you up when life leaves you in the cold.

**The first time I heard the late E.K. Bailey in person, he told of his senior year at Bishop College in which he preached at seven vacant churches. Each one called someone else. Hurt, frustrated, and disillusioned, he determined never to preach at a vacant church again. But when he preached at the eighth vacant church, Dr. C.A.W. Clark of the Good Street Baptist Church in Dallas walked in the side door. He left his pulpit on a Sunday morning to support Bailey. When they asked him to have words, he told that congregation, “I can’t vote. But I can hope. And I hope that you vote for this young man. He’s full of potential. And he has suffered some disappointed. But I stake my ministerial reputation on this young man. He’ll be a blessing to you, if you give him a chance.” Dr. Bailey said that church called him a few months later, not so much because of his giftedness, but because of the recommendation.**

There will be times in your life when you need a Caesar Clark to come in the side door to encourage you when you are in the cold. And the best way to make sure that happens is for you to be a Caesar Clark for someone else who is in the cold. We

often condemn “fair-weather friends.” But this verse tells us that it is important to cultivate friends while the sun is shining. An anonymous author wrote: “I went out to find a friend and they were nowhere. I went out to be a friend and they were everywhere.” You can’t live in a way that keeps everyone at arm’s length, demanding your space, then expect people to rush to lie next to you when life leaves you in the cold. You need to develop and maintain intimate relationships of mutual care when the sun is shining. When life leaves you in the cold, you have someone close enough to come lay beside you to keep you warm.

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#### **IV. TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE WHEN YOU ARE IN A FIGHT.**

In Luke 10:25-32, Jesus tells his famous parable of THE GOOD SAMARITAN. The backdrop to this story is about a man who fell among thieves while traveling between Jerusalem and Jericho. Apparently, he was traveling alone, when robbers attacked him, robbed him, beat him up, and left him for dead. This must have been the scenario Solomon had in mind in his final point of argument for why two are better than one. Verse 12 says: “And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him.” This statement confronts us with the fact that you may be attacked along life’s journey. You may be the victim of personal attacks. Some personal attacks come from people you don’t even know. Indeed, people don’t have to know you to not like you. Some people just don’t like the way you look. Even worse, some personal attacks come from people you know really well. That is, there are times you are attacked by people who are supposed to be working with you and walking with you. You will be attacked by people you thought were on your side.

Moreover, if you have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, you will experience spiritual attacks. Ephesians 6:11-12 says: “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against rules, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Satan and his demonic forces strategically work to undermine and overthrow your faith in Christ. And there will be times when your faith is attacked. And you will inevitably discover that spiritual victory often requires fellowship with others as well as faith in God. Mark it down.

- **There are some attacks you cannot face on your own.**
- **There are some battles you cannot fight on your own.**
- **There are some enemies you cannot defeat on your own.**
- **There are some attitudes you cannot change on your own.**
- **There are some habits you cannot break on your own.**
- **There are some problems you cannot solve on your own.**
- **There are some needs you cannot meet on your own.**

Ephesians 6:10-13 is a call to arms in spiritual warfare. But verses 14-17 records the battle equipment God has provided to enable us to stand our ground against the enemy. It’s called “the whole armor of God.” There is a girdle, breastplate, shoes, a shield, a helmet, and a sword. But there is nothing to protect the soldier’s back. But the original readers would not have had a problem with this.

The ancient Roman soldier didn't need armor to protect his back, because he never went to battle alone. They went to battle in legions, which represented thousands of soldiers. So the Roman soldier didn't worry about his back. He knew that he had fellow soldiers alongside of him, who would watch his back. The Christian army is the only army in the world that shoots and kills its own wounded. But it ought not to be that way. The church ought to be a place where we have one another's back and stand together when our faith is attacked. As a Christian church, we cannot promise people that they will not have any battles to fight when they put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But we can promise that you will not have to stand alone.

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Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 declares and defends the principle that two are better than one. But the last line of verse 12 intensifies this principle with the statement: "a threefold cord is not quickly broken." Note the progression of the text. From two are better than one to three are even better than two. A single cord can hold up only so much. A double cord can sustain more weight. But a threefold cord can be three times more than a single cord. It is not quickly broken. This closing statement reminds us again that there is great strength in spiritual unity. VANCE HAVNER used to say that snowflakes are frail little things. But if you get enough of them together, they can stop traffic. This is the power of unity with others.

But this is also a statement about the power of faith in God. That is, if it is a powerful thing for two people to hook up with another person; how much more powerful is it for two people to hook up with God. In Matthew 18:19-20, Jesus says, "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." When we get together, and then hook up with the Lord, there is no limit to the good things that can take place in us and through us. On the other hand, we will not be much of a help to one another when we hook up together without God.

Luke 24:13-34 tells of two disciples who walked the Emmaus road after his resurrection from the dead. Though together, they were greatly discouraged because they thought Jesus was dead. Jesus joined them on the road, but they did not know him. And when they gave their sad story, Jesus began to explain to the scriptures to them. When they arrived in Emmaus, the two men asked Jesus to go home with him. And when Jesus blessed their bread, they knew it was Jesus. But Jesus disappeared from their presence. And they went back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples, saying to one another, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" The point is that these two professing disciples were together, but they were of no help to one another, because they did not believe the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. But when they had a personal encounter with the risen Lord, they had a change of attitude and were able to be a witness to others.

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In my final word, I want to contradict the point that I have been making in this sermon. There is one occasion when one is better than two. It is when it comes to the matter of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Elvis Presley supposedly wore a cross, a Star of David, and other religious medals around his neck. Somebody once asked him, Elvis, why do you wear all of those?" What is your religious belief?" He replied, "Well, I don't want to miss getting into heaven on a technicality." Covering all the bases of religious truth claims will not make you right with God. In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus is the blending of deity and humanity. Jesus is the meeting place of time and eternity. Jesus is the intersection between earth and heaven. And the only way to be saved is to run to the cross and put your faith in Jesus who died for our sins and rose from the dead.

**THERE'S NOT A FRIEND LIKE THE LOWLY JESUS  
NO NOT ONE, NO NOT ONE  
NONE ELSE CAN HEAL ALL OUR SOUL'S DISEASES  
NO NOT ONE, NO NOT ONE**

**NO FRIEND LIKE HIM IS SO HIGH AND HOLY  
NO, NOT ONE! NO, NOT ONE!  
AND YET NO FRIEND IS SO MEEK AND LOWLY  
NO, NOT ONE! NO, NOT ONE!**

**JESUS KNOWS ALL ABOUT OUR STRUGGLES,  
HE WILL GUIDE TILL THE DAY IS DONE  
THERE'S NOT A FRIEND LIKE THE LOWLY JESUS  
NO, NOT ONE! NO, NOT ONE!**