

**CHASING THE WIND**  
*“Together” Ecclesiastes 4:7-12*  
May 6, 2023

**INTRO:** National headline in one of the local papers this week, *“Surgeon general says loneliness poses risks as deadly as smoking.”* The article goes on to say that it’s costing the health industry billions of dollars annually. When they speak of loneliness they aren’t talking just about couples, they’re talking about the lack of everyday relationships with friends. Research shows that Americans, who have become less engaged with houses of worship, community organizations, and even their own family members in recent decades, have steadily reported an increase in feelings of loneliness. Americans spent about 20 minutes a day in person with friends in 2020, down from 60 minutes daily nearly two decades earlier. For ages 15-24 there has been reported a 70% drop-in time spent with friends during the same time period. Yet, God has not intended us to do life alone, for He created us for relationship, relationship with Him first and foremost, and then relationship with others. How do I know this to be true? The Scriptures tell us this and so we’re going to look at the theme, *“Together,”* from Ecclesiastes 4. In the upcoming weeks we’re going to take one emphasis in each of the chapters in Ecclesiastes. In this chapter Solomon communicates that there is a real need for community for every person. As I read the Scripture from Ecclesiastes 4:7-12, (page 1038 in pew Bible) this morning I want to ask the question, *“Why is there a need for relationship with others?”*

**Ecclesiastes 4:7–8a** Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. *“For whom am I toiling,”* he asked, *“and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?”* This too is meaningless— a miserable business! Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Look at how Solomon begins this passage:  
*“Again I saw something meaningless under the sun...”*

We remember that this word, *meaningless*, is used over and over again by Solomon: it is repeated 5 times in the second verse of the first chapter. In the NKJV and ESV the word is *“vanity.”* It can mean vapor, breath, like a puff of smoke coming from a fire or your breath on a cold winter morning.

Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of this verse, *“Smoke, nothing but smoke. There’s nothing to anything – it’s all smoke.”*

It can carry the idea of things that are *pointless*.

What is it that he saw as pointless?  
*“There was a man all alone; he had neither son or brother.”*

**Ecclesiastes 4:8b** There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. *“For whom am I toiling,”* he asked, *“and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?”* This too is meaningless— a miserable business!

The man who is all alone works endlessly to attain wealth that brings no contentment or enjoyment. It’s almost as if God is shouting to us: it’s truly pointless, and nothing but smoke if you and I think we can do life alone.

In the New Testament we find repetition of this thought.

**Hebrews 10:23** Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

**Hebrews 10:24** And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

**Hebrews 10:25** Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

This morning I would like to point out 4 benefits of *doing life* together, and, of course, the opposite would be true of attempting to navigate life alone.

## **IMPROVES PROFIT, PRODUCTIVITY, PERFORMANCE v. 9**

Ecclesiastes 4:9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:

*“two are better than one:”* you certainly would hope that this would be true.

But when two people work together well, they accomplish more than twice as much as either one could accomplish alone. I have seen this again and again in the church as other pastors or elders have challenged my ideas and improved my ideas for ministry. (Philip Graham Ryken)

The pattern for church leadership given in the Scriptures is plurality of elders. The church is better off when it is led by multiple men who meet the qualifications for elders given in the Scriptures.

*“return:”* (*reward* in other translations) here it refers to the success that comes through co-operation.

*“toil:”* this is very unspecific; whatever responsibilities or pursuits may be undertaken, companionship will help surmount the difficulties. (Michael Eaton)

Most of you know that Gary Wedde, Jeff Brandt, and I hang around with each other. We coach together, bike together, used to run together, laugh together, share and pray together. I knew Gary for many years before he moved from the Poconos out here with a job transfer. Prior to that he and I trained for and ran a few marathons together (he always beat me). Sometimes when we would run together and we wanted more of a recovery run we would remind each other that we weren't going to run hard. Sometimes that worked and sometimes it didn't. Why is that? It is because we would push each other. If we were doing a hard workout we would work harder when together. Why is it important as a cross country team that we run together? It is a fact that you do better together. We've figured that out with sports, but we think it's somehow different when it comes to everyday life. I know I am a better husband, father, coach, and pastor because of these men.

I know that this church is better off having more than just me as one of your shepherds and leaders. How about you?

Together improves profit, productivity, and performance. It also:

## **PROVIDES RESCUE AND RESTORATION v. 10**

**Ecclesiastes 4:10** If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!

We need one another in times of trouble. Have you ever got thrown by the challenges, trials, and troubles of life?

*“if one falls down:”* during the time when this was written if one fell down at night into a pit or a ditch it could prove to be fatal if there wasn't someone to help get them out.

This also could go beyond a physical mishap. It could be a time of discouragement as there seems to be one difficulty after another.

**Proverbs 17:17** A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

This could include when we need correction because we have sinned and walked away from the Lord. Do you and I have people in our lives that are willing to tell us like it is and lovingly confront us when we sin?

**Galatians 6:1–2** Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. **2** Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

*“restore:”* present, active, imperative

*“carry:”* present, active, imperative

You know what we say in the United States when it comes to this? It is none of my business. We are told, “Keep your nose out of other people's business.” Instead of lovingly approaching the person sometimes we tell others about what they're doing or saying. If it is a fellow believer it is our business! We will all need correction at some point in our

lives!! When I need to approach someone, I find it helpful to admit to the person that I know I will need someone to come to me when I sin. The Bible has a fair amount to tell us about our response to correction.

**Proverbs 10:17** He who heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray.

**Proverbs 12:1** Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.

**Proverbs 15:5** A fool spurns his father's discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.

**Proverbs 15:10** Stern discipline awaits him who leaves the path; he who hates correction will die.

God loves His children too much to not discipline us.

**Hebrews 12:5–6** And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

It is so important that we have someone to rescue or restore us that Solomon says, “pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!”

Together improves profit, productivity, and performance; provides rescue and restoration; and thirdly:

### **BRINGS COMFORT**

**v.11**

**Ecclesiastes 4:11** Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?

What is Solomon referring to in this verse? This isn't just a husband and wife sleeping together, but travellers in Israel's cold winter nights slept close together. You hear stories of people caught in the frigid cold trying to stay warm by sleeping close together, sharing their body heat.

Duane Garrett, “It is an image derived from that of travelers who must lie beside each other to stay warm on cold desert nights. But the usage is here metaphorical for emotional comfort against the coldness of the world.”

The Psalmist speaks of the comfort the Lord provides.

**Psalm 23:4** Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

**Psalm 119:52** I remember your ancient laws, O LORD, and I find comfort in them.

**Psalm 119:76** May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant.

Philip Graham Ryken, “The desert gets cold at night, and if a pilgrim is walking alone, he will freeze, maybe even to death. But not if he has a companion! Two of them can sleep back to back and stay warm all night.... This is not just good travel advice but wisdom for the soul. There is spiritual warmth in going through life with other believers. It is easy to grow cold in the Christian life, to become numb to the work of God, and eventually to freeze almost to spiritual death. But when we are growing cold, the heat of another Christian can warm us up.

The Apostle Paul tells us that God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others.

**2 Corinthians 1:3–4** Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Sometimes we just need to be there! When Job was going through the loss of his family and his possessions his friends came immediately.

**Job 2:11–13** When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. **12** When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. **13** Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.

Together improves profit, productivity, and performance; provides rescue and restoration; brings comfort and

### **GIVES PROTECTION**

**v. 12**

**Ecclesiastes 4:12** Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Martin Heim, “This and the entire section is capped with a supporting proverb: *and a three-fold cord cannot be torn quickly*. The proverb draws on the authority of traditional wisdom to drive home the point that has been made all along: that life in community is far superior in every way to a solitary existence. There is no place for individualism and self-reliance in the thought-world of Solomon.

**ILLUS.** When I was a Boy Scout, I always enjoyed going to Scout Camp every summer. I spent a fair amount of time in the conservation and waterfront areas. At the beginning of the week of camp everyone had to take a swimming test. We all had a circular tag with the color that matched the level we passed. All our tags were on a board and you had to put your tag on the board for the area you were swimming in. You had to have a “buddy” with you at all times. At different times the lifeguard would blow the whistle for a buddy check and you had to be close to your buddy. Why did we need a buddy? It was for our safety and protection. A person could go under in the lake quite quickly and having a buddy could save their life. If you didn’t have a buddy you couldn’t go swimming.

Solomon’s point is that two is far more than twice the protection of one and three is many more times superior. The Bible speaks of the enemies we each face.

**1 John 2:16** For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.

**1 Peter 5:8** Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Who is it that has your back, spiritually speaking? Do you believe you are in a spiritual battle?

Together improves profit, productivity, and performance; provides rescue and restoration; brings comfort and gives protection.

### **SO WHAT???**

Back to the article I began with this morning from the Surgeon General, “We now know that loneliness is a common feeling that many people experience. It’s like hunger or thirst. It’s a feeling the body sends us when something we need for survival is missing.” It not only affects our physical life, it has an impact on our spiritual life.

-Those who are married may say that their spouse is the answer to all these things I have listed. Our spouse can certainly be a great help in each of these ways, but our first friendship must be with the Lord.

Jesus is described as being a “friend of sinners.”

\*Together improves profit, productivity, and performance

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:13)

\*Together provides rescue and restoration

The Lord disciplines whom He loves (Hebrews 12:5-11)

We are in His hands, in His shadow, and under His wings (Psalm 91:1-4; John 10:25-30); He forgives and restores the believer (1 John 1:9)

\*Together brings comfort

He is the God of all comfort who comforts us in all of our troubles (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

\*Together gives protection

He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5)

-If you and your spouse both know the Lord all the things mentioned above should be a part of your relationship.

-We also need others in our lives: men need other men and women need other women!

Are you involved in a small group of any sort? How about a home group? We have several in this fellowship. Maybe you could host one in your home or maybe you could facilitate one. If you’re a young person how about youth group and life groups? These things won’t just happen. We need to be committed to pursuing them, making time for them.

To do life alone sounds brave and self-confident but it is foolish and a recipe for disaster. Can I urge you to STOP doing life alone!