

“To Be or Not to Be Alone” (Ecclesiastes 4:7–12)(2.12.23)

Ecclesiastes 4:7–12 (NIV84)

⁷ Again I saw something meaningless under the sun:

⁸ 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!

⁹ Two are better than one,

because they have a good return for their work:

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!

¹¹ Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.

But how can one keep warm alone?

¹² Though one may be overpowered,

two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

LET US PRAY

“To Be or Not to Be Alone”

INTRODUCTION:

Please open your Bibles to the very beginning; you know, where it says, “In the beginning.” This is the Creation account. I want to point out something to you that is pretty simple, but also profound.

Genesis 1:3–4 (NIV84)

³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.

Genesis 1:10 (NIV84) God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:12 (NIV84) The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:16–18 (NIV84)

¹⁶ God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and

the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:21 (NIV84) So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:25 (NIV84) God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:31 (NIV84) God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Genesis chapter 2 is a retelling of the Creation Account from a different perspective. Genesis 2:15–18 (NIV84)

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

¹⁸ The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Did you catch that? Everything God created was good. In fact, it was very good. **The first thing that God declares NOT GOOD is for the man to be alone.** This is God’s verdict. We are not to be alone.

BODY:

You might think that with February 14th being only two days away that this is going to be a Valentines Day message. Well, it would be a very rare occurrence for me to preach about a secular holiday. But, it is true that today's scripture from Ecclesiastes has often been used during wedding ceremonies. I myself have read it during the lighting of a Unity Candle where the bride and groom celebrate there coming together with the Lord – A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Qoheleth, our teacher and preacher, gives us several examples of how two are better than one. He starts with a negative example of man who pursues wealth at the expense of all relationships. He was ALL alone – no friends, no children, no brothers. He had his work and wealth, but there was a void within, a vexation of spirit. Not only couldn't he find satisfaction, he was miserable.

Two are better than one. This seems so obvious that we might wonder why Qoheleth, and others in scripture, take the time to bring it up. Before we get to Qoheleth's three examples, I have simple one from this week.

I went to Brigantine to play pickleball this week, but only three of us showed up. We played three games of two against one. Each time the team of two beat the single player. When I was the single player, at one point the score was 4-4. The next point was very long and they ran me all over the court. I won the point to go ahead 5-4, but I was completely spent and didn't score another point. Two certainly proved to be better than one.

Two people cooperating together have a good return for their work. We have all heard expressions like two heads are better than one. We can not only share ideas, we can stimulate each other to be more creative. We can have complimentary gifting. We double our experience base.

Back in the 1980's, the Coast Guard sent me college for a two-year Associates degree. For most of that time, I had the same two lab partners in several classes. One of the assignments was to create a testing process for a digital chip called a flip-flop. One partner had experience with a microprocessor. Another partner had learned how to connect an interface adapter. I had previously taken a programming course. Our final project exceeded the expectations of the instructor to the point that we received an A+ with the plus extending to infinity!

Each of Qoheleth's examples has to do with traveling. In his day travel was arduous, dangerous, and time consuming. Most people had to walk everywhere. If there was a road, there was no asphalt or concrete. There were paths over rocky terrain.

Falling down was a very real occurrence when travelling. And, someone might not come along for quite some time. Not only might you be injured, there were wild animals to worry about. Pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up. Of course, this has a widespread application into many areas of life.

There were very few lodging options while traveling and most of the time people had to sleep outside in the elements. Usually, they only had with them what they

could carry. They would have a cloak to keep warm. As desert environments got extremely hot during the day, they got very cold at night. So, two travelers would lie close together, sharing their cloaks and body warmth. It wasn't just a matter of comfort but of survival.

Thieves and bandits were a common danger on the roads. Think of Jesus' story about the Good Samaritan. Luke 10:30 (NIV84) In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead."

This was the reality of travel in those days. Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. And if two are better than one, how much more so would three be? It is not just a matter of addition, but of multiplication.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken for a few reasons. There is increased strength for sure. There is also increased durability. On a Coast Guard helicopter, there are rescue hoists. They have hoist cables made out of a type of wire rope. There are very strict guidelines about how many breaks in the wire are allowed before mandatory replacement of the cable. When a strand breaks it is not just a matter of a decrease in lifting capability. The likelihood of the cable unwinding and coming apart increases. By being wound together, they help hold the whole cable together – each strand securing and strengthening the others.

Yes, being alone in our daily walk makes it harder on many levels. Hear the lament in Psalm 102:7 (NIV84)

I lie awake; I have become
like a bird alone on a roof.

And in Psalm 142:4 (NIV84)

Look to my right and see;
no one is concerned for me.

I have no refuge;
no one cares for my life.

Scripture lifts up individual prayer and Jesus often modeled taking time alone to pray. But then Jesus encourages us to gather together. Matthew 18:19–20 (NIV84)

19 “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

When Jesus sent out His disciples to prepare the way for Him, how did He send them out? Mark 6:7 (NIV84)
Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.

I have mentioned to you before the story, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan. It is a little book with a great story. If you haven’t read it, I HIGHLY recommend it. I have placed it in the RightNow Media Ecclesiastes Bible Study, in the 5th week.

Christian is the main character and he is on a pilgrim journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. He has old friends and new friends. Some friends that hinder and some friends that help. Early in the story, we have this exchange:

“The man [Christian] said, “My neighbors, why did you come after me?”, to which they replied, “To persuade you to go back with us.” But the man said, “I just can’t do that. You live in the city called Destruction, the place where I too was born. I have seen that if you die there, you will sink lower than the grave, into a place that burns with fire and brimstone. Listen to me, my neighbors, and come with me!”

Obstinate: “What? And leave all our friends and our possessions behind?”

Christian: “Yes, because all that you forsake is not worthy to be compared to just a little of that which I’m seeking to find. If you come with me and also find it, you will be as blessed as I, for where I go there is more than enough to go around. Come on, and let me prove it to you!”

Obstinate: “What are you seeking, since you’re leaving everything you own to find it?”

Christian: “I seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, which does not fade away. It is laid up in heaven, and is safe there, to be given to them that diligently seek it. Here, just read it in my book.”

Christian’s book is his Bible.

My four grandchildren in Port Republic have all gone to The Pilgrim Academy. The two older ones have graduated with the oldest, Rachel, now attending Lancaster Bible College. Pilgrim is a Christian School preparing young Christians for their journey in this world. Every student at The Pilgrim Academy reads The Pilgrim's Progress.

Rachel was home visiting, so Carol and I went out to see them on Friday night. Because I have been working on this message, I asked if they knew why the school had its name. Ethan went right to his backpack, pulled out a notebook, and retrieved a piece of paper in less than 30 seconds. Last October, that question was part of lesson they had to learn.

Where did the name Pilgrim Academy come from:

The name of the school was chosen by Dr. Warren A. Allem, the school's founder for the following reasons:

1) The Bible calls Christians strangers and pilgrims on this earth (Hebrews 11:13) because a pilgrim is someone who is traveling and hasn't reached his home. As Christians, our home is heaven, so we are just traveling through this time on earth.

2) Our founding church – Emmanuel Church – was originally a Congregational Church, which was the denomination of the Pilgrims who came over on the Mayflower.

3) The Pilgrims on the Mayflower left England and came to America so that they could have religious freedom. We left the public schools of the U. S. so that we could have

the religious freedom to teach all knowledge in light of God's Word, the Bible.

Christian's best friends in The Pilgrim's Progress were Evangelist, Charity, Faithful and Hopeful. No my friends, it is not good for man to be alone. Loneliness is a liability.

Loneliness is Common



- 52% sometimes or always felt alone in 2019. In 2018, that number was 46.
- 47% sometimes or always felt that their relationships were not meaningful in 2019. In 2018, that number was 43.
- 21% have no close friends.
- 58% said they sometimes or always felt like no one knew them well in 2019. In 2018, that number was 54%.

Loneliness and Health



- 77% of adults with poor or fair physical health are lonely, compared to 50% of adults with excellent or very good physical health.
- 85% of adults with poor or fair mental health are lonely, compared to 42% of adults who report excellent or very good mental health.
- 26% increase in the likelihood of mortality among individuals who feel lonely.
- 45% increased risk of mortality in seniors who are lonely.

Loneliness and Health



- 29% increased risk of heart disease in individuals with poor social relationships.
- 32% increased risk of stroke in individuals with poor social relationships.
- Loneliness and isolation have similar effects on health as being obese, an alcoholic, or smoking 15 cigarettes per day.
- Loneliness is more harmful than not exercising.

Loneliness Among the Elderly



- 44% of Baby Boomers sometimes or always feel lonely.
- 16% of Baby Boomers have no close friends.
- People with a high degree of loneliness are twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's as people with a low degree of loneliness.

Sometimes making new friends is difficult, especially as we get older. **Be A Friend**

I went out to find a friend,

But could not find one there,
I went out to be a friend,
And friends were everywhere!

You and I are already part of community. We are part of the Body of Christ. Paul spoke a lot about the connections within the Church. Each of us are like a different part of the same Body:

1 Corinthians 12:21–26 (NIV84)

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!”
And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!”

²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

CONCLUSION:

On the night before His journey on earth was to end, Jesus’ disciples were gathered around Him. He was preparing them for His painful departure. Jesus was commanding them and comforting them.

John 15:12–17 (NIV84)

¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

My friends, you and I are never alone. We have each other. We have the promise of our Savior, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." I repeat to you, where two or three are gathered, He is there in our midst. Hebrews 10:24–25 (NIV84)

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

AMEN & AMEN. LET US PRAY.