

Two Are Better Than One

August 16, 2026

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Session Outline

1. Two Are Better Than One (Ecclesiastes 4:9)
2. Benefits of Community (Ecclesiastes 4:10-11)
3. Three Strands (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

Theological Theme

Community is vital for the Christian life (we really are better together).

Call to Action

How are you fighting against living in isolation? What steps do you need to take toward community now?

Two Are Better Than One

Introduction

At times, the best news we can receive is a canceled plan. You've likely seen online memes and jokes about the celebration that happens when a plan gets canceled and the plan maker, instead, gets to stay home. And you've probably felt that way at times too.

Sometimes, a canceled plan is good for us. Many of us cram our schedules so full that we barely have a minute to rest. Rest is so vital that God commanded His people to rest in community and communion with Him (Exodus 20:8-11).

But sometimes we move beyond this, and we aren't so much resting as we are hiding, alone and cut off from others. In our post-COVID world, this is easier than ever to do. We can work from home and never have to change out of our pajamas to join a Zoom meeting. We can follow along with our friends' lives on Facebook, consuming curated tidbits of photos and posts. We can even watch church online without having to wake up early on the last, precious day of our weekend.

Modern wisdom has something to say about this.

Studies show that one in three adults in America feel lonely. One in four feel like they lack social and emotional support.¹ These percentages are staggering. The CDC reports that social isolation and loneliness can have significant negative impacts on your health, increasing your risk factors for a number of problems (heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression, anxiety, and even earlier death).

Conversely, the World Health Organization reports that being socially connected can improve your health and reduce the risk of early death.²

Many studies are now conducted on this subject (especially following the COVID-19 pandemic), but the Bible has been teaching this truth for much longer (Isn't it fun when modern medicine catches up to what God has been telling us all along?).

Today, we're going to look at what the Bible has to say about living in community.

- ❓ How important is community to your daily life? How do you practice being in community regularly?
- ❓ What makes it easier for us to live in isolation? What are some other negative effects you've experienced of isolation?

Session Summary

In today's reading, Solomon addressed the subject of friendship and community. There are some things we must do alone. But ultimately, God created us for community and calls us to live in community with His people. Community picks us up when we fall, comforts us when we are low, and fights for us, even when it's hard. As Solomon wrote, "two are better than one" (v. 9).

1. Two Are Better Than One (Ecclesiastes 4:9)

- ❓ What do you think it means for a pair to have "a good reward for their efforts" (v. 9)?
- ❓ What might be the connection between community and living the most fulfilling life (the broader theme of Ecclesiastes)?

It is not good for us to be alone. We were literally created to live in community (Genesis 2:18). Sometimes we must learn this lesson the hard way, but we aren't alone. Scripture provides several cautionary tales here.

Remember Elijah's big showdown with the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18? Baal's giant host of prophets couldn't produce fire on the offering to their (little g) god, even after hours of trying. But when Elijah presented an offering to God at the evening sacrifice (even drenching it with water for good measure), "the LORD's fire fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench" (1 Kings 18:38). Talk about a mountaintop moment! Yahweh beat Baal and his prophets soundly.

Do you remember what Elijah did next? Jezebel, who had successfully murdered many before him, swore to kill Elijah, and Elijah got out of dodge. He headed straight for physical isolation and perceived safety. Even after an angel visited him and encouraged him to nap and eat at the broom tree, he walked forty days and nights until he got to Horeb (Mount Sinai) and holed up in a cave.

A True Friend

In all the hardships and disappointments of life, few things give more real, lasting satisfaction than true friendship. A friend is a comfort in need and a help in trouble. Verse 11 does not refer to sexual relations but to shared warmth between two traveling companions on a cold desert night. At the same time, it may imply that the best friend for life ought to be one's spouse.

To Elijah, isolation meant safety, but God's plans for Elijah required him to be in community. He wouldn't let him stay there. He met him there, and asked him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:13) His isolation hadn't helped his despondency. God reminded him that He wasn't done with Elijah yet. God sent Elijah back into community and reminded Elijah that he wasn't alone. There were 7,000 Israelites who hadn't bowed a knee to Baal, and Elijah would have a direct successor.

In Numbers 11, Moses was trying to manage the overwhelming task of tending to God's people on his own shoulders. Scripture says he was "provoked" (Numbers 11:10). He called out to God when the burden (and whining) became unbearable. And God had a good solution. He appointed seventy elders to help with the load and said:

"They will help you bear the burden of the people, so that you do not have to bear it by yourself."

—Numbers 11:17



When was a time you moved toward isolation? How did this impact you?

Both of these are reminders in different ways that isolation isn't good for us (Proverbs 18:10). Two really is better than one.

2. Benefits of Community (Ecclesiastes 4:10-11)



What benefits of community did Solomon list in these verses? How does this serve as an encouragement?



What drawbacks to isolation did Solomon call out? How does this serve as a warning?

In community, if you fall, a friend can lift you up. Sometimes, we need this kind of help physically, but more often we need this help emotionally and spiritually. A friend helps carry the burdens that life throws our way. A friend reminds us that we aren't alone, offering advice and support.

Oil and incense bring joy to the heart,
and the sweetness of a friend is better than self-counsel.
—Proverbs 27:9

Solomon used the example of physical warmth to express there are many ways one friend can comfort another. The presence of a friend can be comforting, and a listening ear can be therapeutic. Community is vital to the church and is the model God set up for us in the New Testament!

Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

—Acts 2:46-47

The early church lived in community, and the church and the gospel flourished because of it.

God calls us into community to take care of each other throughout Scripture:

And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

—Hebrews 10:24-25

Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

—Galatians 6:2

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.

—1 Thessalonians 5:11

As the early church worked together in community, the whole church was strengthened. The gospel spread further. God's people were taken care of and encouraged. Burdens were shared. No one had to go through life alone.

Theologian, pastor, and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who lived and ministered (and actively opposed Nazi rule) in Germany during World War II, wrote a book called "Life Together" about the importance of Christian community, giving insights and advice on what it really means to live together in Christian community. He wrote:

"Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ."³



How have you experienced the benefits of life together with God's people?

Community is not always easy, but it is a vital part of the Christian life. We are better together, and God designed us this way.

3. Three Strands (Ecclesiastes 4:12)



What point did Solomon make in this verse?



How does this inform our idea of Christian community?

Solomon began today's passage by writing about how two are better than one and ended by saying three are even better. There is strength in numbers. There are many places we could look to see the benefits of a community converging (Peter's friends going fishing with him in John 21 after Peter denied Jesus three times, the believers gathering to pray for Peter's release from jail in Act 12, etc.). The story of the paralytic man's healing in Luke 5 is another instance that shows the power of community:

Just then some men came, carrying on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed. They tried to bring him in and set him down before him. Since they could not find a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the roof tiles into the middle of the crowd before Jesus. Seeing their faith he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."
—Luke 5:18–20

These men were going to make sure their friend got help, no matter what, and they knew Jesus was the one He needed.



Do you have this kind of community? Who are those who will carry you to Jesus and that you can do the same for?

A cord of three strands is not easily broken and the community of God's people is even stronger.

Conclusion

As with many things in the Christian life, community is simple, but not easy. To engage in community, we must put ourselves out there, get vulnerable, and possibly enter spaces that make us nervous. We have to make plans and keep them!

But the benefits are undeniable.

Have you ever had to lean on a friend in a hard time? Has a friend ever lifted you up when you fell? Do you have friends who would literally break through a roof to help you? If so, you know the great value that a friend can bring to your life. A good community makes you better. They show up and they help.

Our group has a chance to be a community like this: a group of mat carriers, who will encourage, lift up, and show up. But it requires all of us leaning in toward the community God desires us to be.

- ❓ How has your community shown up for you in your life? What happened? How did it impact you?
- ❓ How are we taking care of those in our community, and what could we do to improve?
- ❓ How does living as a godly community make us more attractive to those who don't yet know Jesus?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for the gift of community. Thank Him for all the ways your group has shown up for each other over the years. Ask for His help as you seek to cultivate an even closer, more godly community.

Memory Verse

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. — Ecclesiastes 4:9

Additional Resources

- *Be Satisfied* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Exalting Jesus in Ecclesiastes* by Daniel Akin and Jonathan Akin
- *Ecclesiastes* by Philip Graham Ryken



Historical Context of Ecclesiastes

Purpose

Ecclesiastes shows us that since we and our works are futile—that is, destined to perish—we must not waste our lives trying to justify our existence with pursuits that ultimately mean nothing. Put simply, Ecclesiastes examines major endeavors of life in light of the reality of death.

Author

According to 1:1 and 1:12, the author was David's son and a king over Israel from Jerusalem. Also, 12:9 speaks of the author as a writer of proverbs, so Solomon appears to be the author. Many scholars believe that Ecclesiastes was written too late in Israel's history for this to be true, and they want to date the book at least five hundred years after Solomon's time (later than 450 BC). However, strong evidence attests that the book does come from the age of Solomon. For instance, it displays a great knowledge of literature from early Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Setting

Ecclesiastes is Wisdom literature, meaning that it is in the part of the Bible especially concerned with helping readers cope with the practical and philosophical issues of life. It has roots in the Wisdom literature of Egypt and Babylon. Books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are the biblical answer to the search for truth. Proverbs is basic wisdom, giving the reader fundamental principles to live by. Ecclesiastes, by contrast, is for a more mature reader. It engages the question of whether death nullifies all purpose and meaning in life.

Special Features

The Bible is never shy about confronting painful truths or hard questions. The book of Ecclesiastes faces the issue of how we can find meaning in life in light of the seemingly futile nature of everything. It will not allow the reader to retreat into superficial answers. It does not answer this problem by comforting us with hollow slogans. To the contrary, its motto is "Everything Is Futile." But by forcing us to face the futility of human existence, it guides us to a life free of empty purpose and deceitful vindication.

Extended Commentary

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Friendship is the theme of this section. The advantages of friends are that they help one another get work done, that one friend sustains another when disaster strikes, that they give comfort to one another against the bitterness of life, and that they protect one another from enemies. Interestingly, friendship is one area of life that Ecclesiastes never calls “futile.”⁴

References

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4. Duane A. Garrett, “Ecclesiastes,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).