

Better Together
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

May 23, 2021 am

HDBC

We are emerging from the worst pandemic in a 100 years. Our hearts continue to ache for other parts of the world where people are still be impacted at epidemic rates and where the death tolls remain alarmingly high. However, here in the U.S. things are moving toward normalcy. For that we are grateful.

As we begin to come out of this year of relative isolation it is a great time to be reminded that we **Really do need each other**. We isolated for the greater good, but extended isolation can be harmful to our health. Mental health professionals are dealing with this right now. We were made to live in relationships with other people. When God created Adam, He said **it is not good for man to be alone**. So, He created a companion.

Marriage is a primary antidote to the problem of isolation & loneliness, but it is not the only one. Not everyone is married. And even for those who are married, your spouse cannot meet all of your needs for relationships. We were also made to live in the meaning relationships found in the community of faith, the church.

So, as the required isolation is slipping behind us, I want to challenge you to remember that you were made for relationships. It is time to get **reconnected & reacquainted**. It's time to renew **fellowship**, deepen **relationships** & establish **connections** with new people.

June 6 is the beginning of a new schedule for Sunday mornings.

June 6 is an opportunity to reconnect with others in your church.

There are some real benefits from doing life **Together!** The Bible says so. Ecclesiastes is an O.T. book written by King Solomon late in his life. In places it can read like one who was disillusioned with life. In other places we find incredible clarity and precision from one who had experienced the highs and lows of life. Read what he wrote about doing life **Together**.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

In someone cryptic language, Solomon reminds us that life is **Better Together**.

A student from another country shared a pointed assessment of Americans. ***Americans are loners!*** First reaction might be defensive. But think it through.

Americans value mobility, convenience and privacy more than almost anything else. Privacy is one of our most cherished values. But to gain privacy we often forfeit one of the greatest gifts God has given us, relationships with others.

This mentality has even crept into the churches. The church is not a place to slip in and slip out without any interaction with others. ***We are not a bag of marbles thrown into the same bag bumping together.*** We are like the human body. Intimately connected with one another, held together by a common faith, a common experience and a common Lord.

Solomon had learned that through life's experience, and wrote it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. To put it simply, life is ***Better Together!***

He offers the direct statement that two are better than one. Then offers four reasons why this is true. Four benefits of living life in relationships with others.

1. **Productivity (9)**

Outcomes. Results. Not difficult to understand. Two can get more work done than one. When the labor force is doubled, the encouragement of knowing someone is working alongside you will boost productivity.

Not only will you have an extra pair of hands doing the work, but will also have another perspective on how it can be done. Advice, and counsel can save you from many disasters. Living bible says ***The results are much better.***

Its why students study together,

Policemen patrol together,

Army rangers never go into battle without a buddy at their side.

Marines never to dig a foxhole big enough for only one, but for two.

It's why we partner with other churches in the SBC to do missions. We can do so much more together.

Many years ago in a Midwestern county fair there was a competition to see who had the strongest draft horse. The winning horse pulled a sled that weighed 4,500 pounds. The second place horse pulled 4,000. Someone had

the idea of hooking them together to see what they could pull. How much do you think? 8,500 pounds? No. Together they pulled 12,000 pounds.

Over the course of several months, Peter Skillman conducted a study pitting the skill of elite university students against that of the average kindergartner. Groups of four built structures using 20 pieces of spaghetti, 1 yard of tape, 1 yard of string, and 1 marshmallow. The only rule, the marshmallow had to end up on top.

Business students began by diagnosing the task, formulating a solution, and assigning roles. The kindergartners, by contrast, got right to work, trying, failing, and trying again. Author Daniel Coyle explains the outcome, “We presume skilled individuals will combine to produce skilled performance.” But this assumption is wrong. In dozens of trials, the kindergartners built structures that averaged 26 inches tall, while the business school students built structures that averaged less than 10 inches.

We see smart, experienced business school students, and we find it difficult to imagine that they would combine to produce a poor performance. We see unsophisticated, inexperienced kindergartners, and we find it difficult to imagine that they would combine to produce a successful performance . . . individual skills are not what matters. What matters is the interaction.

The kindergartners succeed not because they are smarter but because they work together in a smarter way. They are tapping into a simple and powerful method in which a group of ordinary people can create a performance far beyond the sum of their parts.

2. Help (10)

When you fall it's good to have a companion to lift you up. And you **will** fall. Crises in life are certain. Often too late to find a helper after you fall. Too late then to go looking for companion. **May be on top of the world right now**, but you will not always be there. When you are down, you need a friend, a companion.

When my children were learning to ride a bike I was running alongside them to catch them and/or pick them up. Gave them courage.

When I was learning to snow ski, it was a companion's presence that gave me the courage to go to the more difficult slopes. I would not have done it alone. Someone there to bail me out. To pick me up.

Scout camp - swimming. Everyone had a buddy. Big trouble if you did not have your buddy with you.

Jackie Robinson, the first black man to play Major League baseball, faced venom nearly everywhere he traveled--fastballs at his head, spikes on the bases, racial slurs from the opposing dugouts and from the crowds.

During one game, the taunts seemed to reach a peak. A team mate, a white man named Pee Wee Reese, called timeout. He walked from his position at shortstop toward Robinson, put his arm around Robinson's shoulder, and stood there with him for what seemed like a long time.

A statue commemorating this event was unveiled in New York in 2005. The gesture spoke more eloquently than the words: This man is my friend. Robinson later said that this action saved his career.

We all need someone who can come alongside us and put their arm around us. Need a buddy to go through the fires with us. A buddy who can pick us up when we fall.

3. **Warmth** (11)

Great statement. Take it literally? Sure.. But I think there is more than physical warmth.

Support. Encouragement. Companionship. Comfort when the elements around are less than warm.

First day on a new job, good to have a friend.

First day in a new school, good to have a friend. (1st, 2nd, 4th, 6th, 10th, 11th)

In courtroom to testify and you are afraid.

Giving an oral report in class, great to have a friend.

Japan has appointed a "Minister of Loneliness" to try and reduce loneliness and social isolation among its residents as the country deals with rising

suicide rates. During the month of October, more Japanese died from suicide than had died from COVID-19 in all of 2020. There were 2,153 suicide deaths that month and 1,765 total virus deaths up to the end of October, according to the Japanese National Police Agency. Studies show that loneliness has been linked to a higher risk of health issues like heart disease, dementia, and eating disorders.

People have worked to solve the loneliness issue in a variety of ways. One company designed a robot to hold someone's hand when they're lonely and one man charges people to simply sit with them and "do nothing" except keep them company.

Fear is multiplied by aloneness but divided by friends.

4. Perseverance (12)

There are adversaries out there. Attacks come. Great to have a **fellow warrior** there to watch your back side. To enter the fray with you. To engage the enemy on your behalf.

Spiritual enemy is Satan. Great to have Christian friend who knows how to pray and do battle with the forces of darkness. One who recognizes his tactics and warns you when you are susceptible to attack and defeat.

Solomon offers a great example.

Rope. Strong because it is more than one strand woven together. Take it apart and you could easily break each strand.

Paper. Easily tear one sheet. But put several together, and there is resistance, strength. That's what relationships do. Strengthen.

Snow storm in pine woods. *Trees standing alone become overcome and break off. Those in groves actually lean against one another and survive.*

Applications

Personal

Get out there and relate! Make some friends! Be a friend and see what happens. Open up. Share yourself. Take the risk. Text someone and meet them for coffee or lunch. Get started this week.

Church

The church is built on the foundation of Christ and His Word. But it is held together by relationships. If you aren't connected with others you are not likely to stay. Not talking about us becoming a more friendly church. **The friendliest thing in the world is a wet dog.** We don't need to be more friendly, we need to be more relational, more loving, more caring, more connected. Even as we are deepening the connections we have, we must ALWAYS be reaching out and drawing others into our connections.

Someone once said, *people in the church are like porcupines in a snowstorm. We need each other to keep warm, but we prick each other if we get too close.*

Must relate to one another. It will not happen automatically, but it must happen. **It is what will keep us attractive to people who need the church** and will keep us attractive to those who are already in church.

Relationships are the magnets that keep people close and involved in church.

When you get to the end of your life it won't matter how clever you were on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. You won't long for more time on your device. What will matter are relationships. First, your relationship with Jesus. Second, your relationship with others.