

A Rock Feels No Joy  
Ecclesiastes 4:9-16  
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“A winter’s day in a deep and dark December, I am alone, gazing from my window to the streets below on freshly fallen, silent shroud of snow. I am a rock, I am an island. I’ve built walls, a fortress deep and mighty, that none may penetrate. I have no need of friendship, friendship causes pain. It’s laughter and it’s loving I disdain. I am a rock, I am an island. I have my books and my poetry to protect me; I am shielded in y armor, hiding in my room, safe within my womb, I touch no one and no one touches me. I am a rock, I am an island. And a rock feels no pain, and an island never cries.”

Some of you remember that song Paul Simon wrote and sang back in 1968. Yet, I think those words still reflect the attitude of a lot of people in our culture. We often admire the self-sufficient person, someone who will say, I didn’t need anyone else but myself. In fact, privacy is often considered an inalienable right. Many folks long to live in a secluded house, maybe somewhere up in Angora, where they will not be able to see or be seen by any neighbors. And folks who have neighbors, often believe it is food fences that make good neighbors. My 50th high school class reunion is coming up later this summer. When contacted about the event, one of my classmates responded “I won’t be coming, I just don’t like people.”

Our desire for privacy is often combined with a pessimism about our closest relationships. Some think there is no such thing as a friend that can really be trusted. They would agree with George Ade when he said “A friend who is near and dear, may in time become as useless as a relative.” And Yes, some folks are very skeptical that they can have truly positive relationships with those in their extended family.

Even within our own homes, relationships between husbands and wives or parents and children are often anything but encouraging. Betty Friedan, the feminist author, once said, “The chief cause of division in our society is marriage.” I don’t disagree with that, but some divorced people claim their lives are much better now that they’re single again and have the freedom to live how they please. In fact one survey found those who had gone through a divorce often said they were somewhat relieved

because it now gave them more time to be online with their phone or computer. Psychics note that we are a high tech, low touch culture, where many folks are more comfortable relating to virtual realities, than they are to real men and women. In fact, some people prefer and have developed relationships with AI entities or robots rather than with human beings.

Some of you are thinking, “Wait a minute,” Pastor Dan, “That’s not me. I like people. I like my family, I like my friends, I like the people in our church. I even like my neighbors. I don’t want to be a loner. I don’t want to be friends with a robot. I need other people.” Well, if that is how you feel, super! That attitude pleases the Lord. While it is true that relationships with other people often cause pain and tears, it is also true that a rock feels no joy, and an island never laughs. A truly happy and satisfied individual is someone who relates to others. God didn’t intend for any of us to be self sufficient lone rangers. Right from the beginning, the Lord said, Genesis 2:18 “It is not good for man to be alone.” We are made to have a relationship with God and to have relationships with other people.

This morning as we continue our journey through the book of Ecclesiastes, we come to chapter 4:9-16. Here Solomon shares some of the lessons he has learned about friendship. As we look at these verses, my hope is the Lord will use His word to help us with our friendships and cause us to desire even deeper relationships with people around us. Let’s take a look at what Solomon says. Eccl. 4:9a “Two are better than one,” that is Solomon’s basic conclusion. It is not good to be alone. His topic is not specifically marriage. He is simply talking about having a true friend. But another family member, a neighbor, a coworker, or someone at church can be that friend, that trusted companion as well. As a human being, you need someone like that in your life. You are not meant to be a rock or an island. Why? Solomon says, Eccl 4:9 “Two are better than one,” because they have a good return for their labor: or as NLT says, “The results can be much better.” Solomon then gives 3 specific examples that illustrate why this is the case.

#1.) A terrific friend can help us when we are in trouble. Eccl 4:10 “If either of them falls down,

one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help him up.” When we goof up at work, or blow it in a relationship, or fall into sin, it is good to have a friend who will be there to help us when we stumble. Some folks will insist they don’t need help, even in very difficult circumstances.

A number of years ago, a young woman fell asleep while driving near L.A. Her car plunged through a guardrail and ended up dangling over the edge of the road by its left rear wheel. Passing drivers stopped and using ropes were able to hang onto the car until more help arrived. It then took 2 ½ hours for the police, rescue squad and tow truck driver (25 people) to secure the car and pull the woman to safety. “It was kind of funny,” the rescue squad chief recalled later. “She kept saying, ‘I’ll get out by myself.’”

Friend, do you know someone like that? It seems men especially like to say, “I don’t need any help. I can take care of myself.” Fortunately more and more people seem to be realizing how wrong that thinking is. Folks, each of us falls down sometimes. When that happens, we need someone who is willing to help us get up.

#2.) A true friend comforts us in difficult times. Eccl. 4:11 “Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?” This may be true in the bedroom, but Solomon’s point goes well beyond that. When life is cold and harsh, a true friends warms us with comfort. The icy blasts of life can hit any of us.

Maybe the doctor tells us the biopsy results are not good, or one of our children or grandchildren has to spend time in jail. Or perhaps you find out that your spouse is having an affair. When something like that happens, there is often nothing a friend can do that will make the circumstances any better. But a friend can help keep you warm. A true friend will stand beside us in our most difficult times and often will just be there so we are not alone. I know some people want to be left alone to grieve when someone they love has died. That is ok, for a little while. It is good to suspect their privacy. But it is not healthy to be alone with our grief. When tragedy strikes, we need friends just to be there.

#3.) A true friend comes to our aid if we are under attack. Eccl. 4:12a Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. When others at school are spreading malicious rumors about you, a friend will stand p for you. When there has been a misunderstanding at work, and

the boss is really down on you, a friend will go with you and try to straighten things out. When the enemy of our soul, Satan, launches a spiritual attack and tempts us, a friend will faithfully pray for us. That’s the type of support we all need.

So, a true friend helps us when we are in trouble, comforts us in difficult times and aids us when we are being attacked. These are 3 reasons why friendship is so valuable. Solomon then sums p his point Eccl. 4: 12b “A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” This verse is appropriately used at wedding ceremonies but Solomon seems to apply it to a broader context.

Any type of partnership, marriage, business, ministry, friendship, that is built on a common desire to honor the Lord, is a cord of 3 strands. Whenever 2 people are working together, seeking to obey God and experience His blessing that is a powerful combination. Solomon thinks friendship is a wonderful thing. The next verse, 4:13-16, really addresses another topic, but they also provide an interesting contrast. Eccl. 4:13-16 “Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning. The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king’s successor. There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, (HEVEL) a chasing after the wind.”

Did you catch his point? A king will have multitudes of people lined up and cheering wherever he is. But when he is old, and there is a new king ready to take his place, the crowds forget all about the old king. Their attention and affection all focus on his successor. And one day the new king will be old and the crowds will forget about him too. Solomon’s point, one that celebrities of all flavors know, is that popularity can be very empty and fleeting. The high school quarter back throws the game winning touchdown will probably have all sorts of people telling him what a wonderful person he is. But few of those folks are real friends. Next season, there will be a new quarter back and most of those fans will have forgotten all about him. Popularity is empty, meaningless, HEVEL. There is much greater value in having true friends. So, what should we learn from these words on friendship? I will mention 4

things that struck me as I thought about this passage. I trust theses will be helpful to you.

#1.) A person who trusts and follows the Lord, should have close friends.

Some folks think if you are really a godly, special person, you don't need friends. In fact, some argue that not having friends is a good thing, because it helps us depend on God alone. The Roman Catholic tradition has sometimes exalted celibacy and monastic vows, implying that isolation from others is the path to godliness. In Baptist churches, I have heard people sing, "On the Jericho Road, there is room for just two, no more and no less, just Jesus and you." I've been told, "Pastor Dan, I have been so disappointed with others Christians. I now realize that I should trust God alone and never trust anyone else."

Now, it is true that sometimes following the Lord will require that we take a lonely path. Being faithful to Jesus sometimes means marching to the beat of a different drummer. At times we will have to swim upstream when it seems everyone else is floating downstream. But that doesn't mean we should not have trusted friends. Clearly our best model on this point is the Lord Jesus himself. As the eternal son, Jesus Christ had a perfect relationship with God the Father. There were times when God called Him to walk a path where no human being could join Him. When He prayed in the garden, everyone else fell asleep. Sometimes Jesus was alone, and He was lonely.

But Jesus had friends. Good friends. The 12 disciples, especially Peter, Andrew, James and John, were His friends. There were other friends, such as Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Having friends, wanting friends, needing friends is not a bad thing. It is not a sign of spiritual weakness. God desires that we have fellowship with Him and with other human beings.

#2.) We should not be content with shallow friendships.

Some people claim they have many friends, but in honest moments, will admit there is not one they really trust, no one with whom they feel comfortable sharing their weaknesses and worries. No one they would run to for help if they were in trouble. Solomon describes not just a friend that you talk about football with over coffee or you go shopping with at the mall. He is talking about a true friend. Good friendships, whether in marriage or another type of relationship, are built upon good communication. We need to talk to our friends. We need to talk about more than how the

fish are biting or about a new recipe we tried. We need to talk about our feelings and our souls.

As Christians, we need to be honest with each other about our relationship with God. It is especially good to have a friend with whom you can talk about your struggles with doubts and temptations. One of the best ways to deepen our friendships is to pray for each other and to pray with each other. When a husband and wife pray together, when families pray together, when co-workers pray together, when a group of students pray together, deep friendships tend to develop.

#3). It is good to have more than one trusted friend.

Though Solomon's emphases seems to be on having one partner, I think having 3 or 4 more good friends is even better. Some claim you really cannot expect to find more than 1 or 2 good friends in a lifetime, but I don't think that is true. Jesus certainly had more friends than that. When we read the apostle Paul's letter in the N.T. we find the names of about 40 different people that he lists as friends, a lot of them close friends.

In His marvelous book, "The Four Loves," C.S. Lewis points out that this is one the differences between erotic love and friendship love. When we're talking about romance and marriage, 2 is company and 3 is a crowd. Having a 1000 wives and concubines like Solomon doesn't work out well at all. One man, one woman. That is what a marriage relationship is meant to be. However, when it comes to friendship, Lewis says, "The more the merrier." Good friends rejoice when they find another person who shares their values, goals, & desires. A boy and a girl who are dating like to eat at a restaurant by themselves, just the 2 of them. But friends, like to get together as a group and having 10 people at a table is much more fun than having 2.

The lesson for us is that we should not be satisfied with just having 1 or 2 close friends. We should seek to build and strengthen both old and new friendships. Some folks say, "My spouse is the only friend I have or want." That may sound romantic, but it is usually not a healthy marriage. It is unfair to expect one person to fulfill all our emotional needs. Here at our church, I think some people seem content with their friendships they have so they maybe hesitate to befriend new people coming into the congregation. That is unfortunate. Cultivating new friendships and developing deeper relationships with old friends are both important ways of experiencing joy in life

and staying emotionally and spiritually healthy. That means,

#4.) We need to reach out and befriend others.

Yes, we should be grateful for the friends we have. We should thank God for them and we should tell our close friends that we really appreciate their friendship. But I would suggest each of you prayerfully ponder, and then identify one person with whom you believe the Lord would like you to have a better friendship. Maybe it is someone you know pretty well, but you think the Lord wants you to deepen that relationship or maybe it's someone you have never really talked to, but you believe the Lord wants you to reach out and become her friend. Then remember, when that person is in trouble, help him. When she is going through a difficult time, be there to provide comfort. When he is under attack, come to his aid. Instead of being a rock or an island, the Lord wants you to be a bridge over troubled waters, who lays down your time, energy, and money for the sake of your friends.

In conclusion, I want to go back to where we started today, and remind you that the Lord Jesus is the best friend of all. I have painted a pretty bright picture of human friendship today. Yet, even though I am convinced everything I have said is true, I also realize that at times our friends, even our closest friends, can let us down. When that happens it can be a very painful experience. We need to remember what the wise King Solomon said in Proverbs 18:24 "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Folks, it is wonderful to have good friends who will help you when you are in trouble, comfort you in difficult times, and come to your aid when you feel under attack. But don't make the mistake of relying only on your human friends to do this. There is no one who can provide better help. No one who can give greater comfort. No one who contributes more aid, than the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no better friend than Jesus, who enables you to be a better friend to others as well.

How does one become a friend of Jesus, how do you experience His love and friendship in your life? By grace, through faith. We become a friend of Jesus as we trust in Him. It begins by receiving Jesus as your savior. If you have not done that, this is the place to start. But it must not stop there. To develop a good friendship with Jesus, to come closer to Him, involves frequent communication with Him through Bible study and

prayer. It involves learning to trust Him in many aspects of Life. Oh friends, May the Lord help you to draw closer to the Lord Jesus, to grow in your relationship with Him, so that He will be honored, so that you will be encouraged, and so that you will be able to be a better friend to others, and so that you will experience the joy of friendship in your life.