



# MEANINGLESS

## AUDIO DEVOTIONS

### ON ECCLESIASTES

#### **The Solitary and Self-sufficient Life is Meaningless**

(Ecclesiastes 4:7-12)

*Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: <sup>8</sup> 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! <sup>9</sup> Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: <sup>10</sup> If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! <sup>11</sup> Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*

I've always thought that one of the most surprising verses in Scripture is when the Lord says of the perfect man he created who was living in the perfect world, a literal paradise, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). We were designed by God to exist in community and communion with each other and most importantly with him, who made and loves us. It is good for us to support one another and contribute together towards common goals.

Now none of this (nor the title of this devotion) is meant to imply that it is sinful or wrong to be single. The Apostle Paul was single, and he appreciated how the single life enabled him to live in undivided allegiance to the Lord and freed him from concerns for a family when making ministry decisions (1 Cor. 7:1, 29-35). Our Lord Jesus was the only perfect person, and he was single. Nor is Solomon's observation purely a matter of circumstances or personality—being introverted or extroverted. This person had no family to legally inherit his possessions—"neither son nor brother"—but he kept on slaving away, refusing to be satisfied. He had embraced that he was living for himself. I imagine the person who says, "I can take care of myself. I don't need anyone else. I don't want anyone else. This is my life. I'll do with it what I want." It is one thing to be able to take care of yourself, but it's something else to live for yourself to the exclusion of associating with or relying on others.

Solomon lauds cooperation and teamwork for their practical benefits. For one, you get a better return on your labor. The other day I fixed a broken bookshelf. If I had tried to do it on my own, I could have Jimmy-rigged things, but it would have taken me a lot longer and been much more frustrating. Nor would I have had the satisfaction of teaming up with my daughter for a job well-done. Without a reliable companion (or companions), we have no one to lift us up when we fall down, when life knocks us over because it most certainly will. It does not matter how self-sufficient we are, how much money we have, how healthy we are, or any other human metric. This side of perfection we can be brought low without a moment's notice. Remember what happened to Job? He was the greatest, wealthiest man of the East, who had ten children, massive possessions, and the admiration of his countrymen. In one day all his property and possessions were taken away and most tragically of all, all ten of his children were killed in a building collapse. Not long after that Job was afflicted with festering boils from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. Disaster, disease, accident, and so much more can bring any of us to our knees in an instant. As Solomon will say later in Chapter 9, "As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them" (v. 12). At such times having cultivated friendships and relationships is vital. The same things could be said of keeping warm when we and our hearts grow cold and having a friend whom we trust to go back-to-back against our foes.

Solomon's wise words encourage us to be open and vulnerable to finding such a friend and also being willing to be that self-scarifying, "I'm here for you, whatever you need it" kind of friend. Yet while friends are great, they're not perfect either. Friends can fail us. They can't always be there for us when we need them. But that doesn't mean that we should retreat back into self-sufficiency and solitude. In Proverbs Solomon speaks of "a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24). Here he points to that "third friend," who is stronger, more compassionate and understanding, and ever-present in every need: the Friend of Sinners, the LORD, our God. Through mutual faith in him our relationships and friendships can be bound together in God—built on his unlimited love, forgiveness, and patience. So glued together with our Christian companions, a cord of three strands is not easily broken.

For your self-reflection:

1.) Whether they be many or few, thank God for giving you faithful friends. If possible, set aside some time after this devotion to send a note of thanks and appreciation to those companions through whom the Lord has picked you up, kept you warm, and defended you.

2.) Ask God open you up to being a more physically, emotionally, and spiritually present friend for the people in your life. How can God use your relationships to introduce (or reintroduce) your friends to the best Friend of all?

Prayer: *Dear Father in heaven, my every moment is a gift of your grace. For your mercy's sake support my body and supply my spirit all day long. Forgive me for my stubborn self-reliance and free me to depend on you and be a friend like you to everyone I meet. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*