

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-4/ecclesiastes-49-12/>

Solomon advocates for the benefit of human community—what we can do when we work together rather than against one another or alone.

Solomon transitions into a pragmatic commentary likely spurred by the story of the lonely workaholic. *Two are better than one.* The word for better is towb, “good.” Solomon makes a case for living and laboring in partnership. As a part of a team. A community. The application is not limited, but some of what is said seems to fit best in a marriage context.

Why are two better than one? It is because they have a good return on their labor. Solomon then provides three examples why this is the case.

The first example why *two are better than one* concerns when either of them falls. When two together pursue their labor, one will be there to lift up his *companion*. If *either of them falls* (literally “if they fall”), the *one will lift up his companion*. The nuance of these words suggest unity and rising together. So, it is true to say “one will help the other up.” It is also true to say if they both fall, they can both help each other up. Like when two people are sitting and clasp hands to propel each other to their feet. *But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift them up.*

The second example is just as practical. Lying down together is a good way to stay warm. If *two lie down together they will keep warm*. But the man *alone cannot be warm*. It’s better to be warm than to be cold.

The third example concerns strength, and the abilities to withstand an attack from an *oppressor*. *One can overpower him who is alone*, but *two can resist* an attacker. Oppression is bad. But one way to stave it off is through numbers. A team will always be stronger than an individual.

Solomon now provides a different sort of illustration. He observes that *a cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart*. Adding the third strand helps make it clear that the value is not just in a pairing but in increased numbers. Teamwork, living and working in community adds a lot of strength.

Biblical Text:

⁹Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor.¹⁰ For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.¹¹ Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm *alone*?¹² And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three *strands* is not quickly torn apart.