

Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

Doing Life Together

Main idea: We, as the church, who are called to reflect God and point people to Jesus, are to be there for one another throughout life to point each other back to Jesus, and especially during the hardest times.

I want you to think back to when you were a child, and try to recall what it is that you wanted out of life. What did you want to be when you grew up? What were your hopes and dreams? What did you think life was all about?

If you were to ask me as a child what my hopes and dreams were, I would have told you that I hoped to be a famous actor, or a famous baseball player, and I dreamt of making lots and lots of money, so much that I could regularly give my parents trashbags full of cash.

So aside from that strange random desire, it's interesting that many of our hopes and dreams when we were young revolved around one person: ourselves. We want to accomplish our dreams. Our goals. And this seemingly makes the call of Jesus that much harder, because He calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him.

The show "Lost" is easily one of my favorite shows ever. After their plane crashes on a tropical island, the survivors begin to

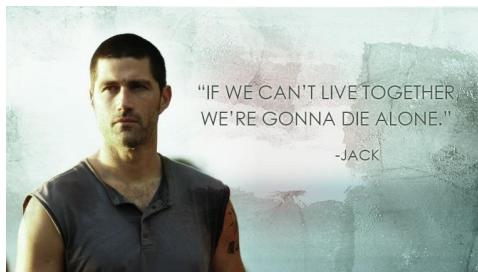
experience the dangers of the island, and they begin to distrust one another, and they are at each other's throats. And then this happens.

[Clip from Lost]



That became a kind of proverb throughout the show.

[Quote from Lost]



“If we can’t live together, we’re gonna die alone.” But that doesn’t just apply to trying to survive on a tropical island after a plane crash. It’s true of us, too.

In our world today, we have the ability to be more connected than ever because of technology and social media, and yet we’re more divided than ever because we allow our opinions to divide us. And certainly there’s a place for standing up for your convictions, but even as we do so, we need to love one another.

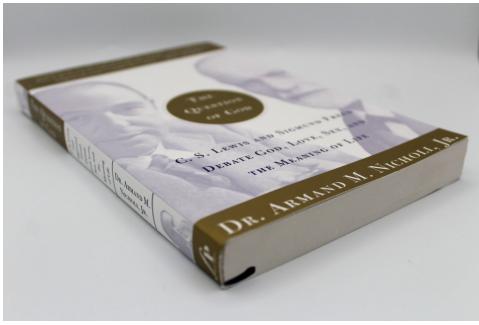
Because if we can't learn to live together, we're gonna die alone.

Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

Again, I saw futility under the sun: There is a person without a companion, without even a son or brother, and though there is no end to all his struggles, his eyes are still not content with riches. "Who am I struggling for," he asks, "and depriving myself of good things?" This too is futile and a miserable task. Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up. Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm; but how can one person alone keep warm? And if someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:7-12)

Father, help us to learn to live together, and not just in a superficial, surface-level, getting along kind of way. Help us to truly love one another, as You love us. In Jesus's name, Amen.

[Picture of The Question of God]



In his book, “The Question of God,” Dr. Armand Nicholi, a professor at Harvard Medical School, compared the worldview of C.S. Lewis with the worldview of Sigmund Freud. C.S. Lewis, of course, was a Christian who laid out a very clear rationale for believing in God through his radio talks, which were later edited into the book *Mere Christianity*. And even though he was an atheist, Sigmund Freud was also consumed with the question of God’s existence. But because of the existence of things like suffering and loneliness in the world, Freud argued against God’s existence because, he said, believing in God made little to no difference in a person’s life. In 1918, Freud wrote:

“I have found little that is good about human beings on the whole. In my experience, most of them are trash, no matter whether they publicly subscribe to this or that ethical doctrine or to none at all.” - Sigmund Freud

So because of the depravity of man, which is certainly a biblical doctrine, Freud came to have very little compassion for others. And ironically, Dr. Nicholi wrote that Freud’s view of people led to most of his friends and colleagues abandoning him in his final years, so that he died friendless and alone at the age of 83.

We saw last week that it's meaningless and ultimately unfulfilling to try to do life alone. If you swear off people entirely because they've let you down in the past, or even because they can just be so draining, you'll end up wasting away, consuming yourself. You'll end up dying alone.

And this all says a lot about how we see God as well. Do we believe that God is indifferent to our suffering and loneliness, or do we believe that in Jesus, He relieves our suffering through His loving presence?

So our passage today continues that thought, and shows how doing life together, with others, is far better. And even though living with others can certainly be challenging at times, it gives us an opportunity to love others the way God loves us. Verse 7.

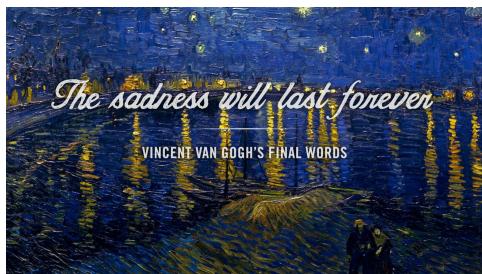
Again, I saw futility under the sun: There is a person without a companion, without even a son or brother, and though there is no end to all his struggles, his eyes are still not content with riches. “Who am I struggling for,” he asks, “and depriving myself of good things?” This too is futile and a miserable task. (Ecclesiastes 4:7-8)

Vincent van Gogh was known to have struggled with depression, anxiety, and loneliness. It's been said of him that he was the kind of person that could feel alone in a crowd, even when surrounded by people who loved him. Because of his

mental health problems, he spent time in a mental asylum, which didn't help with his feelings of isolation. Eventually, he just lost the will to live.

After he shot himself, his brother rushed to be with him, and he heard Vincent van Gogh utter his last words:

[Van Gogh's last words]



He said, "The sadness will last forever."

The more I've talked with people over the years, I've learned that most people have felt this way at times. We've all experienced great loneliness at some point, or at the very least known someone who has.

So in our passage today, the Teacher in Ecclesiastes describes something that happens everyday. For a person to be alone, without a companion, without a friend, without even any family, is a great injustice, and an extremely common human experience.

And what makes this feel even more unbearable is the fact that we were created for community. When God made Adam, he felt

alone. It was the first thing that God said was not good. When God created the earth, He said that it was good. When He created animals, He said that it was good. When He created Adam, God said that it was very good. But when God saw that Adam was alone, He said that it was not good. Interestingly, this was even before Adam and Eve sinned in the garden. It was not good for man to be alone. We were created for community and companionship.

It's such an obvious thing, and yet we often try to solve our longings in other ways.

Many people think that money can solve all their problems, but the Teacher reminds us here that even if you have plenty of money, but you're all alone, you won't be content, and there will still be no end to all your struggles. Because after you've gotten everything you thought you wanted, you'll realize that it's all meaningless, and there's no one to enjoy it with.

I've shared before how being a pastor is often a very lonely calling because even though we're around people a lot, we have few strong companions. One pastor I know wrote that he never realized how few friends he had until he retired from his church. He thought he was leaving on very friendly terms. No one was pushing him out. No one was angry with him. And yet, almost no one bothered to check on him after he retired, either. In a very short time, they had all moved on, and the people that

he had ministered to and spent his life sacrificing for so many years simply didn't even think about him.

I've known other people who have said that they gave up on going to church because they felt even more alone when they attended. No one said hi to them. No one sought to include them. And even if the church was very friendly for the morning, these visitors who took a leap of faith to visit a church because desperately wanted to be accepted by God always got the impression that they would never truly be accepted into the church's tight-knit little friend groups.

Church, this is the exact opposite of how it should be. We ought to be a people who loves and welcomes and includes every person. Because this is how God treats us. We love because He first loved us. It doesn't matter who you are or how much you've sinned. God loves you!

You can't sin so horrendously that God wouldn't welcome you. It's true that our sin offends God, but that's exactly why God sent Jesus. God made a way through Jesus. And when you come to Jesus, confessing your need for Him as your Savior, He will never cast you out, and you will never be alone.

Verse 9.

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him

up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up. Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm; but how can one person alone keep warm? And if someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

I used to love the song that goes, “One is the loneliness number that you’ll ever do. Two can be as bad as one, it’s the loneliness number since the number one.”

And that can certainly feel true. Many people get married because they feel alone, only to find that their marriage didn’t really solve the problem of their loneliness. When God saw that Adam was alone, He said that He would make a helper suitable for him. But in spite of what Jerry Maquire says, your significant other cannot complete you.

But far later, in the New Testament, Jesus promised that when He ascended to the Father, He would send the Holy Spirit to be with us, and He would be our Helper.

Well, anyway, this passage is often used to lift up marriage as an ideal. And it’s true that a cord of three strands, husband, wife, and the Holy Spirit, is not easily broken. But strictly speaking, this passage isn’t talking specifically about marriage, but about how we work, and about how we go about life at all.

Are you the kind of person that seeks to live your own life your own way, relying on yourself, or do you realize you need others, and that others need you?

Because going through life by yourself can not only be lonely, but also risky. If you have no one to call when you're in trouble, it will be that much harder to fight off those who might attack you. And whether we recognize them or not, we have attackers around us all the time. Satan and his demons, the powers and principalities, the rulers of evil in this present darkness are all out to steal our joy. So we, as the church, who are called to reflect God and point people to Jesus, are to be there for one another throughout life to point each other back to Jesus, and especially during the hardest times.

But simply having Christian friends to rely on is not the ultimate goal. Proverbs 18:24 says:

One with many friends may be harmed, but there is a friend who stays closer than a brother. (Proverbs 18:24)

I've known many people with many friends, but the very fact that we're human means that we can't always be there for one another. Freud was right about human nature at times, how none of us are righteous. Apart from faith in Christ, all our greatest acts of righteousness are trash, like filthy rags. So we will certainly fail one another quite often in this life.

But Jesus will always be there for you. Jesus will never leave you or forsake you. When you trust in Jesus, His Holy Spirit comes into your life, so God's presence is always with you, not just in a general way in the world, but in a personal way, uniting with your own spirit.

You see, if you think things like suffering and loneliness in the world are reasons to disbelieve in God's existence, like Freud did, then all you'll see in the world are suffering and loneliness, to the point that you alienate yourself and suffer alone, like Freud did. But if things like suffering and loneliness have a purpose, then we see that in Jesus, God also suffered and felt alone. And if the Son of God suffered with us, as us, then maybe the point of suffering is that we would be united with Christ.

In fact, that's what Paul wrote in Philippians 3. It says:

Everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ - the righteousness from God based on faith. My goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being

conformed to his death, assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead. (Philippians 3:7-11)

And because of Jesus, we will be resurrected. As we follow Him, His story becomes our story. As we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him, we learn that life is far more than what we used to call our hopes and dreams, which often amounted to selfishness. Instead, life is all about God's dream becoming our reality, in which we love Him with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind, and we love our neighbor as ourselves.

You see, Jesus died alone so that we could all live together with Him for all eternity.