Better Together

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[0:00] Have you ever noticed that our modern world is designed to make you less and less dependent on other people?! Technology is all around us. It promises convenience, speed, independence, and in many ways it delivers on those promises.

! We can order groceries without talking to anybody, have them delivered. We can work from home without seeing co-workers. The pandemic kind of made that commonplace.
We can stream, we can scroll, and shop without leaving the house. How many of you are like me and you see something in the store and then you think, can I get this cheaper on Amazon?
Look at this quote. If you'll click into my slides, then I'll go ahead and be able to advance them myself. You'll click me on that first slide, then I'll be, I can advance it.
Pardon me, y'all, up top. Hello, hello. Anybody there? Thanks, Carson.
[1:24] You'll click me into that first slide, then I'll be able to move it on up myself. Sorry, y'all, I don't want you to miss this quote. There we go. Appreciate it.

All right, here we go. In making certain things easier for people, technology has actually demotivated people from using their brains. We have all these devices that keep us connected, and yet we're more disconnected than ever before.
Why is that? Do you see that? It's demotivated people from using their brains. Sure, these devices connect us.
The internet connects the world. We can talk to people literally on the opposite side of the globe from us in seconds. And yet we're more disconnected in society, emotionally, person to person, than ever before, relationally.
So, we don't sit on front porches and talk to neighbors anymore. Does anybody do that? Do you sit on your front porch and talk to neighbors?
[2:32] I see a few heads nodding. That's good, man. I'm glad it's still alive. I see a lot of heads nodding the other way. Nope, just don't. Maybe you'll sit on your back porch.

Maybe you'll have friends over. But the community, everybody used to go out, sit on their front porches. People would walk by. Maybe they'd ride by on the horse and buggy.
Depending on how far back we're going. It's just different now. The world we live in is different. You know, more kids used to go out and play in their front yards. Now we see news reports of kidnappings and we're like, nope, you're playing in the backyard, not the front yard. And these things just happen.
The world has changed. Many of us don't check out with a human at a grocery store anymore. They got the self-checkout line, right? For our kids, for our children, it's even more pronounced.
[3:30] Many of them are growing up with online relationships far more than real life relationships. More connection on screens. Less shared life face-to-face.

We're more connected and yet we feel more isolated. Convenience has replaced companionship. If you'll hold on to that word, companionship, it's going to be a recurring theme in our talk today. Efficiency has edged out community. And into a world like ours today, Ecclesiastes speaks boldly, daringly.
It says something that's actually surprisingly simple and countercultural. It says two are better than one. The message of the world around us is saying the opposite of that.
Saying you don't need another person. We can streamline this and make it more efficient where you can do everything yourself and not have to wait on anyone else.
[4:38] Let's go to Ecclesiastes chapter 4. We've been in this series called Catching Smoke. We're digging through this book of Ecclesiastes. One of the strangest books in the Bible. A lot of similarities between books of the Bible.

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But Ecclesiastes kind of sticks out. Kind of stands alone. It's very unique in its tone, in its message. And we've been digging into it saying what can we learn from this ancient writing from who is called the teacher.
We've identified that as King Solomon. And we've been learning wisdom from him at the end of his life. Arguably the wealthiest and wisest man to ever live.
And we get his end of life advice. So we see this text in Ecclesiastes chapter 4 and verse 9. Two are better than one.
Ecclesiastes 4 doesn't begin with friendship. It starts with competition. Look down at verse 4. I observe that most people are motivated to success because they envy their neighbors.
[5:41] Anybody vibe with that? Listen, I've spent a good amount of my life living in the North Dallas area, DFW. DFW. Do you know what the way of life is down there?

Keeping up with the Joneses. It's the, oh no, my neighbor got a new truck. That means I've got to go out and get a new truck. My friend group all is members of the country club.
That means I better be a member of the country club even if I can't afford it. It's this way of life where people go into great debt trying to keep up with their neighbors.
Well, that's funny because Ecclesiastes 4 says, This is the way it was back then too. I observe that most people are motivated to success because they envy their neighbors.
But this too is meaningless. Like chasing the wind. Remember our little introductory video over there? Catching smoke. You ever try to catch smoke in your hand? It's a fool's errand.
[6:43] You can't do it. You can't hold on to smoke. You open your hand and nothing's there. Chasing the wind is a similarly futile endeavor. Can't catch the wind.

It's always going to be outrunning you. So, this idea of trying to keep up with your neighbors, it's a fool's errand. You're never going to achieve success or happiness that way.
Verse 5. Fools, fold their idle hands, leading them to ruin. And yet, better to have one handful with quietness than two handfuls with hard work and chasing the wind.
Isn't that interesting? It's probably the only time in the scriptures where hard work is painted in a negative light. Is there anything wrong with hard work, church?
No. But there could be. Why are you working? Why are you striving? Why are you working so hard?
[7:52] Is it to keep up with the neighbors? Is it to hit this idea of the American dream that you've had in your mind since you were young? And you've got to hit that retirement age and you've got to buy the RV and travel around America.

Or you've got to take that cruise or whatever it is. Because you think you're going to find fulfillment in that. Is that what the hard work's about? Then Solomon's telling us, that's like chasing the wind. Good luck to you in that because it's never going to fulfill you. So, it doesn't start with friendship. It actually starts with the reality of the competition between us.
How we compete with one another. Comparison fuels achievement. But it's quietly destroying connection between souls. When life becomes about keeping up, proving yourself, or outpacing others, people stop being companions and start being competitors.
Well, this leads us to truth number one. So, let's dig into Ecclesiastes 4, verse 4 through 12. We read 4 and 5 and 6.
[9:04] Let's pick it up in verse 7. This is going to set the stage for our two truths that we're going to try to take away from this passage today. And the theme here is the advantages of companionship.

So, verse 7. I observed yet another example of something meaningless under the sun. Man, Solomon was finding something meaningless under the sun all throughout his writing here in Ecclesiastes. So, here's another one.
This is the case of a man who's all alone, without a child or a brother, yet who works hard to gain as much wealth as he can. But then he asks himself, who am I working for? Why am I giving up so much pleasure now?
It's also meaningless and depressing. Verse 9. Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help.
But someone who falls alone, they're in real trouble. Verse 11. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone?
[10:03] A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated. But two can stand back to back and conquer. Three are even better. For a triple braided cord is not easily broken.

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What do we learn from this? Truth number one. We can treat people as companions or as complications. If you received a bulletin on your way in, there's a spot for you to kind of keep up with the sermon as we go along.
You can fill in these blanks. And the first one here is companions. We can treat people as companions or as complications. Somewhere along the way, when we're little, we're looking for companions, aren't we?
You go to the park and you see kids you don't know and they instantly become your best friends. Well, I had fun with them. That's all it takes, right? I just need somebody to play with.
I need companions. Somewhere along the way, we stop seeing people as companions in life and we start categorizing them. We start sorting them into different categories.
[11:11] Some people are inconveniences. They slow us down. They interrupt our plans. They cost us time. Some people are competitors. We measure ourselves against them.

We envy them. Or if we feel like we're outpacing them, then we see ourselves as superior and we might pity them and it makes us feel better. Well, at least I'm better off than that guy.
Some people are assets. What can we get out of them? How can they help us? Useful to us as long as we benefit from them. They affirm us. They make us feel good about ourselves.
They advance us. When did people stop being companions? The minute they do, they become expendable. Ecclesiastes says that's not progress.
That's poverty of the soul. Your soul is getting poorer and dying a little more inside the less you see each other as potential companions, not potential complications.
[12:21] Look at verse 4. I saw all the toil, all the skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. We think we're achieving, but all we're doing is isolating ourselves.

Comparison turns neighbors into threats. Comparison turns coworkers into enemies. Competition is another one.
Look, I'm pro competition. I want my kids to play all the sports. They may or may not comply with that desire on my part. But we just got done with basketball season.
It was a lot of fun. But comparison, competition, convenience, these things that we think are getting us ahead in life, and it's the definition of winning, these things have the danger of hurting us and others.
Convenience can turn relationships into liabilities. The result is a crowded world full of lonely people. And you look around, even in a small town like Henrietta that can pride itself on its community.
[13:35] How many of us feel isolated? How many of us feel lonely? God never designed us to win alone.

Oftentimes in big cities we see this as an epidemic of loneliness. Surrounded by hundreds of thousands of people. Sometimes millions of people.
And yet you feel isolated. And even in Clay County with thousands of people around us here in a small area like Henrietta. And then you go out into the outlying areas and people can still feel isolated.
You might know people's names. But are they your companions? From the very beginning, God says something that we must not forget.
It's not good for what? For man to be alone. It's not good for mankind to be isolated.
[14:37] So he made a companion. Obviously your marriage companion is the most essential companion that you'll take through life together. But the companionship goes beyond that to all of us.

We must see one another as possible companions in life. We were created for shared life.
Look back at chapter 4 in Ecclesiastes verse 9. Two people are better off than one. They can help each other succeed. But this idea here is not the succeeding.
It's the presence. See, succeeding in this life, success in this life is very small in the grand scheme. God's definition of success and your and my definition of success can often look very different.
I keep hearkening back to it. But last summer we went through about 12, 13 weeks on studying the kingdom of God. We went through the parables of Jesus, stories of the kingdom.
[15:40] If you want to go back and dive into any of that, it's on our YouTube channel at FBC Henrietta. So you can go back and see this presentation of the kingdom of God that Jesus gave his disciples and all those who are listening to his teaching.

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And it's played out in parables or stories that make a bigger point. And he teaches us this upside down world of God's kingdom. So it's fascinating when you see that he who is the least, God considers the greatest.
When you deny yourself, you find fulfillment. The last will be first. It's this upside down world. So when we think we are chasing success at the expense of others, we're not finding success in God's kingdom.
Because we need others. We need each other. So two are better off than one because they can help each other succeed.
It's not all about productivity. It's about the presence of each other, the companionship. And then the next verse, if one person falls, the other can reach out and help. Companionship lifts.
[16:55] Comparison isolates. Scripture warns us what happens when comparison becomes the lens through which we live our life. Paul writes about this in 2 Corinthians.

Let's see. Did I skip over one? I did. All right. Oh, I did. We read this. Genesis 2.18. It's not good for man to be alone. Now we're going on to Paul's writing.
2 Corinthians 10.12. When they compare themselves with each other, they are not wise. They were doing it back in the church in Corinth. Guess what? We still do it in the church in Henrietta.
They're doing it in the churches in Wichita Falls. They're doing it in the churches in Dallas, in Fort Worth. They're doing it in the churches in Nocona. They are comparing each other with themselves.
It's what our natural response is. When we see each other walk in on a Sunday morning, we start evaluating each other. Ladies, you might be looking at how, you know, the other lady is dressed or something or how she did her hair.
[18:01] Where did she get her nails done? I don't know what y'all look at. All right. Guys, you're like, wow, Justin Hensley has a way better beard than I have.

And I've told him that to his face. I'm struggling with the sin of envy when I look at his beard.
Anyway. But we do that. We compare each other with each other.
Paul says it's not wise. It's going to bite you. It's going to hurt you. The companionship between you is going to suffer.
Comparison distorts reality. Because the reality is you don't know what's going on behind the Facebook posts for somebody. You see the pretty picture that they posted on vacation.
And it looks like their life is all buttoned up and perfect and just right. And yours is such a mess. And you don't know what's going on behind the scenes. Comparison distorts reality.
[19:01] And it breeds envy. It turns neighbors into rivals. You lose companions that way. But God designed us for shared life.

Not rivalries. Life was meant to be shared. Lived together with each other. Not competed around.
Companionship gives life in ways that success never can.
It's not all about who wins the gold medal, the silver medal, or the bronze medal. It's about the team being together. Now Paul wrote, I press toward the mark.
I want to win. But you know what he wanted to win? The prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. He didn't want to have a better life than everybody else on this earth.
He didn't want to have more money or more success or more prestige than anybody else on earth. He had that. He was a Pharisee. He was the chief among those who had good reputations in his community.
[20:10] He walked away from it to pursue Jesus. Because he encountered something that meant so much more. He encountered something meaningful.

This leaves us this thought. This challenge. Pursue companionship. Not comparison.
In your marriage, pursue companionship. Not competing with one another. With your children. Pursue companionship.
Don't see them as inconveniences. With your friends. Pursue companionship. Not competition. Not comparison.
Your coworkers. With your neighbors. With fellow church members. Or church attenders. Pursue companionship. See someone. Even who you don't necessarily get along with at first glance.
[21:10] See. How could they be a companion in this life? How could they help sharpen me and I can help sharpen them? How can we bless one another?

Even when at first glance it seems difficult. Truth number two. Community strengthens us. But only God sustains us. Listen. I spent the whole first point pushing community.

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Pushing companionship. But can I remind you of this and put it in context? Community and companionship is only going to get you so far. God has to take you the rest of the way.
He designed us to be in community with one another. He designed us to be companions for one another. But don't put expectations on other people that only God can fulfill.
Only God can sustain us. So in our community. In our companionship. We have to continue to turn to God for sustenance or strength. Look back in Ecclesiastes chapter 4.
[22:09] We just read it a moment ago. The last verse that we read. Verse 12. A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated. But two can stand back to back and conquer. That's right.

Two better than one. Right? But look at this one. Three are even better. Because a triple braided cord is not easily broken. There are two ways to take this. The three is better than two.
Three is better than two in a lot of circumstances. But three is not better than two in a marriage. Right? Right? Just making sure y'all are with me on that.
I know there's like a trend going on these throuples or something. I'm hoping that's not finding root here in Henrietta. Anyway. Except let me throw a curveball at you.
Three is better than two in a marriage. You know why? The third one is the Holy Spirit of God. You've got to have that third cord binding it together and making it stronger than you and she or you and he can make it on your own.
[23:12] Why are divorce rates so high? Why are marriages, some marriages seemingly destined to fail? Because they're only the two of them. They don't have that Holy Spirit making them the strongest yet.

Only God can sustain your marriage. Only God can sustain your parenting. Only God can sustain your friendships.
That's got to be the third cord binding it together. It is not easily broken. Human relationships are strong. They matter. They protect us.
They support us. Human relationships support us and strengthens us. But only God can sustain us. Those relationships are with imperfect people and they will ultimately fail.
And so if we don't want that relationship to break when it fails and just be done with it. And how many times does that happen? How do you prevent that? You've got to have a third cord there.
[24:15] You've got to have something sustaining you. So that relationship, when it fails, doesn't end. I remember watching a TV show about a guy.

There was a scene on the, it was a comedy. And the guy said he'd never been in a real relationship before. He was a young adult. He was dating this girl for the first time. They had a big fight. And he said, well, I guess that's it.
I guess we're just broken up now. She said, what? Why are we broken up? This just went from zero to 60 and nothing at all. He said, well, because we had a fight. He said, that's it for you?
Like, you think one fight and we're done? He's like, well, isn't that the way it is? He said, no. Couples fight all the time. But how many times do we give up on a relationship because it failed once?
How many times do we quit on somebody because they crossed us? Because they let us down? If you don't want it to end because it failed, then you've got to have something stronger than you and the other party.
[25:23] And that is the strength of the Holy Spirit. The relationship is not the ultimate goal. God is the ultimate goal. It's unrealistic to put divine expectations on human relationships.

Even the best people cannot bear the weight of your expectations. They can't bear the weight of being your foundation. Guess what? You can't bear the weight of being your foundation.
I can't bear the weight of being my foundation. You know how many times I've let myself down? Probably as many as you've let yourself down. Only God sustains us.
Unless the Lord builds the house, the work of the builders is wasted. Psalm 127. And then Paul writes again, this time to the church in Colossae. He reminds us, and we just covered the book of Colossians, didn't we?
Just about a month ago or so, we finished that series. And it says, Jesus existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. He holds it all together, doesn't he?
[26:29] He holds you together. He holds your relationships together. That's what that third chord is about that Solomon wrote about in Ecclesiastes. Ultimately, it's Christ himself who holds it all together.

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Community can support the house, but it has to be founded on Jesus. He has to be the one building it. People can strengthen us, but Jesus sustains us. Community is a gift, but it's not a replacement for God.
It points us toward him, not away from him, not instead of him. So, leaves us with this takeaway. Don't ask people to be what only God can be.
I had to put this caveat in here. As God's urging me and I'm urging you to see each other as companions, not competition.
Then we've got to remind ourselves, we can't put all our hope in those people where the companionship will never happen. We can't put too high expectations, unrealistic expectations on each other.
[27:39] However, we've got to hand that to God. Say, God, I know I need these people in my life as companions. But you've got to be the strongest sustaining force in my life.

As a church, we've been looking at the direction that God has for our church. Early on, the last Sunday in December, right after Christmas, we said, 2026 is the year of direction, not perfection, in our church.
This is a key element. What we're learning today is a key element in finding the direction that God has for our church. Walking together.
So, how do we do this? How do we walk together? First off, we have to understand that relationships shape our loves, not just our lives. Relationships shape our loves, not just our lives.
So, what kind of love do you have? It's easy to sing and to say that we love God. But do our actions declare that we love other things more?
[28:52] That we love ourselves more? That there are other priorities that we have in our lives above our love for God? Why do we love Him? Because He first loved us.

And He showed that in ways that you and I can never measure up to. But we don't have to measure up. It was the very point that we didn't measure up. That all of us are sinners. That made God say, I love them despite their sin.
Romans 5, 8. While we were still sinners, we weren't reformed yet. You know? We weren't good people yet. We were still bad people. Guess what? We're still bad people today.
But we're saved by grace. And grace alone. That's when Jesus said, Christ died for us. While we were still sinners. Thank God He didn't stay dead.
Thank God He rose from the grave and He's alive today. We can sing to Him. We can pray to Him. We can have a relationship with Him. He says, come to me, all who are weary. All who are heavy laden.
[29:50] I look around and I see people who are weary and heavy burdened. Jesus says, come to me. Lay your burdens down. Give all your sinful past.

All your sinful present. And guess what? All your sinful future. Give it over to me. I'll forgive it. I'll wash it clean. And I'll hand you a new way of life.
That's not built on perfection. But I'm taking you in a direction as my child. And I'm your father. We're going to do this together. Now, if that's not the kind of relationship that you have with God, today can be the start of that.
In a couple of minutes, we're going to close in prayer. And I'm going to give you an opportunity to slip your hand up and say, that's the kind of relationship that I want with God. A relationship that shapes my love, not just my life.
And this is how we can walk together with each other. Because we have this in common. How else can we walk together? We see leadership as God's signposts, not substitutes.
[30:56] Leadership is not a substitute for God. But it's a signpost pointing you back to God. No matter if it's civic leadership, church leadership, our goal is to point us back to the wisdom and the way of God.

Not all leadership fulfills that well. No leadership fulfills that perfectly. But God calls leaders to be signposts pointing back to the way of Christ.
Not a God substitute. And then thirdly, how can we walk together? We can be a church formed by Christ, not clustered by favorites. I'm not trying to step on anybody's toes here.
Not trying to make anybody mad, all right? But we naturally cluster by favorites. If you look around the church, we will naturally cluster by who we like the most.

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We have to fight against that nature and let Christ form us by finding companionship outside our favorite cluster. Outside our favorite group.
[32:04] That's hard for us to do. Especially in a small town, we kind of grow up already having a friend group. We know who our people are. God says, yeah, but I want to introduce some new people to you. I want to introduce some new companions to you.

Your family group, your friend group is about to get a whole lot bigger. I'm going to give you a whole bunch more companions. This is how we can walk together. This is direction, not perfection.
It's never going to be perfect. It's going to be messy. We're going to mess up. They're going to mess up. But with God sustaining us as the third cord, we will find his direction.
Ecclesiastes reminds us, life is hard. And we are better together. Way better together.
We ain't that hot on our own. But we are powerful together. We are loving together. We are kind together.
[33:06] Together we sharpen each other. Together we cannot be broken. We're only complete in our Savior. We don't look to people as our ultimate hope.

We don't look to relationships as our ultimate hope. But we see each other as companions. Instead we look above the sun. We've been saying it every week. Church, let's say it one more time together.
How do we live under the sun? Let's do it one more time. How do we together live under the sun? God, that's what we do right now.
We close our eyes. We bow our heads. We pray to you. We say lift our eyes above the sun. And then let us see where you are looking. Let us lift up our eyes and look around us.
And see companions everywhere. You don't want us to be in competition with one another. You don't want us to be comparing ourselves to each other. You don't want us to be constantly disappointed in each other.
[34:04] And even sometimes ourselves. You want us to remember that you are the sustenance. And because of you. Because of that common thread. Of you.

Your presence. And your strength. We can have strong relationships. We can find companions that help us get through this life together. Show us how that can go.
Show us who that can be. Show us what we need to change. We learn from the scriptures. If you want to have friends. You got to be friendly. Maybe we haven't been very friendly.
Maybe we've been pretty self-absorbed. Whatever it is. God change us. Give us thriving companionships. Within this church.
Within this community. Built around our shared love of Jesus Christ. Music is going to play for just a minute or two.
[35:02] Would you take this time. To think and pray through quietly in your own seat. God what would you have me to do? Who would you have me to be? How do you want to change me?

Have I been ignoring some companionships? Have I been seeing people as complications? Complications. Not human beings created in the image of God.
Brought into my life for a very specific reason. And I'm in their life for a specific reason. It's not to fight and war with each other. It's to have companionship.
You think that through with the Lord. You talk it through with him right now. I'll ask the question I said I was going to ask.
There's anybody who says that relationship with Jesus that you described. That's the kind of relationship I want. But I don't think I have that right now. Can I sit down with you sometime and talk through.
[36:09] How to have that genuine meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ. Would you slip your hand up now. And I'll talk to you. I'll pray with you. Thank you. God we come to you right now.

And we open up our hearts and say. You move within us. You mold with us. Teach us how to abide with you. And then teach us how to abide with each other. We leave here today.
Let this lesson from the teacher in Ecclesiastes. Be confirmed by your Holy Spirit in our hearts. And change us. Change we as a body, as a church.
To be more united. To walk in companionship together. We want to see what you're going to do. Through a church like that. It's in Jesus name we pray.
Amen. Amen.

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