

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

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Who are your best friends? Do you have really close friends? Picture your best friend in your mind. Just to think about him or her makes you comfortable and want to smile, doesn't it? Think about your best friends.

Friends are God's apology for family. Many of you know God really does need to apologize in regard to some of your relatives. You choose your friends; you are stuck with your family.

Pavol Demitra had an easy \$500,000 staring at him, but he passed.

It was more than an empty-net goal that the St. Louis Blues left wing passed up in the final seconds of that 3-2 win over the Los Angeles Kings in 1999. That goal would have given Demitra 90 points that season and triggered a \$500,000 bonus paid over the next two years of his contract.

Why pass up a half-million dollar shot?

Because winger Scott Young was skating on his left, down the slot, with a \$300,000 bonus of his own set to kick in if he could score one more goal. So Demitra put his bonus in Young's hands in the hope that his teammate could cash in as well.

But with \$800,000 on the line, Young fired a shot that Kings defenseman Jaroslave Modry went down to block, sending the puck to the corner as the final horn blew.

No goal. No bonus for Demitra or Young.

"That's the most unselfish thing I've ever seen," Blues defenseman Jamie Rivers said of Demitra's pass. "That's why he's the ultimate team player."

Young scored his 24th goal earlier in the game. Twenty-five would have triggered his bonus.

"I don't know what kind of angle he had, but he gave it to me and if I put it in, we both hit," Young said.

Demitra said he had a good angle. His reason for the pass?

"He needed a goal," Demitra said. (<http://espn.go.com/nhl/news/1999/990419/0217163.html>)

Demitra was a true friend to Scott Young. Friends like that are as rare as four-leaf clovers.

Putting others first is the essence of friendship. In 1 Samuel 18:1-4, Jonathan's soul "was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself." Jonathan took David's shepherd's robe and gave David his own robe and armor – royal regalia. David was Jonathan's secret self.

Each of us has contact with hundreds of people who never look beyond our surface appearance – these people who, the moment they set their eyes upon us, begin calculating what use we can be to them, what they can get out of us. These folks take one look at us, make a snap judgment, and then slot us into a category so that they won't have to deal with us as persons. They treat us as something less than we are; and if we're in constant association with them, we might become less.

And then it happens. Someone enters our life who isn't looking for someone to use, is leisurely enough to find out what's really going on in us, is secure enough not to exploit our weaknesses or attack our strengths, recognizes our inner life and understands the difficulty of living out our inner convictions, confirms what's deepest within us.

This person is what you call a friend. (Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over A Wall*, 54)

Do you have a friend? Someone with whom you fit together like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. While the rest of the world is deaf to your music, your friend not only hears but recognizes and dances to your tune. Can you think of a friend like that? Someone who really knows you? Someone who really cares?

Stephen Deitz, playwright, says, "What do we affect during our lifetime? What, ultimately, is our legacy? I believe, in most cases, our legacy is our friends. We write our history onto them, and they walk with us through our days like time capsules, filled with our mutual past, the fragments of our hearts and minds. Our friends get our uncensored questions and our yet-to-be reasoned opinions. Our friends grant us the chance to make our grand, embarrassing, contradictory pronouncements about the world. They get the very best, and are stuck with the absolute worst, we have to offer. Our friends get our rough drafts. Over time, they both open our eyes and break our hearts.

"Emerson wrote, 'Make yourself necessary to someone.' In a chaotic world, friendship is the most elegant, most lasting way to be useful. We are, each of us, a living testament to our friends' compassion and tolerance, humor and wisdom, patience and grit. Friendship is the only thing capable of showing us the enormity of the world." (*Spectrum*, August 1999, a quoted in *Context*, March 1, 2000)

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon reflects on the life and the futility of most all that he saw going on about him. Yet in the midst of the negativity, he makes a most interesting observation: Two are better than one. He illustrates his point by describing some situations in life in which two, obviously, are truly better than one.

Solomon's insight is that "two are better than one because they have a good return for their work." Solomon had wisely observed that two individuals working together would be able to

accomplish more than individuals working separately. This principle was discovered by Henry Ford and became the basis of much of our modern industry. You achieve more when you put a group of people together working on a common task. Can you imagine how long it would take one individual to build a car? If the person had to mold the body, put the engine together, manufacture the tires, produce the fabric for the interior and install it and then put every piece of the car together, a lifetime might not be long enough to build a car for yourself. However, because of people working cooperatively together they can produce a car in a matter of minutes. Two are better than one. (Lowrie)

During a hike in the woods, a troop of Boy Scouts came across an abandoned section of railroad track. Each boy in turn tried walking the rails but eventually lost his balance and tumbled off. Two boys, after considerable whispering, suddenly offered to bet that they could both walk the entire length of the track without falling off. Challenged to make good their boast, the two boys jumped up on opposite rails, extended a hand to balance each other, and walked the entire section of track with no difficulty whatever. That, in a nutshell, is the principle of Christian friendship.

Two are better than one. Solomon gives us three reasons that two are better than one.

I. If two fall, one will lift up his friend.

It is not so much marriage that Solomon has in mind. It is friendship. A friend is one that you lean upon when you are weak. He is strong for you when you cannot be strong. He is steadfast for you when you waiver.

A friend is someone with whom you can share your burden when the load is too heavy for you to carry. When you are bowing under the load that you bear, a friend is one who, even before you ask, comes by your side, makes steady your gait, and lightens your load.

A friend is someone who picks you up when you fall. But if you are alone, who will pick you up? You are abandoned, deserted.

I was in junior high, and I was as excited as a fox in the hen house about the youth ski trip my church was about to embark upon. At home, my big brother, a freshman in high school, and I shared a bedroom. And each night we would talk up the big ski trip as we laid in our beds. He would explain the do's and don'ts of skiing. He had skied before – I had not. But when we arrived at the lodge, it became evident that my brother and I had completely different ideas about what should take place on this trip. I was certain that he would ski with me – at least that he would spend the morning with me. But he didn't want to miss a chance to take off with some older youth, juniors and senior who had invited him to run with them. The alternative – hanging with his kid brother – was way down on his priority list. But being with him was tops on my list.

I can remember it as if it were yesterday. I put on my ski boots and skis only to become as helpless as a centipede on roller skates. Trying to maneuver down an icy slope with my body's weight on two six foot sticks four inches wide was not an easy task to master. Out of control and bowling down all the skiers in my path, I finally landed only to find that there is something worse than

wearing two skis – and that is wearing one ski. One of my skis had popped off. I could not figure out how to get the ski that was off on, nor how to get the ski that was on off. I was frustrated with a capital F. After a thirty minute struggle, I was ready to spit nails. I had paid \$50 to lay in the wet, cold snow and wallow like a pig in the mud.

But lo and behold, at just the right time, I looked up to see my big brother – the cavalry has arrived, relief is in sight, someone to come put my off ski on or my on ski off. And as I cried out, “Bryan, Bryan, help, help,” I was stunned to watch him run off like a hound chasing a coon. He didn’t want to be tied down with his little brother. I was crushed. I needed a friend. I needed my big brother. I had fallen and not even my brother would set me upright!

Two are better than one, because when one falls the other can pick him up.

John Anderson worked in the coal mines of Southern Illinois. His was a hard life in the late nineteenth century. For months, during short winter days, he never saw the sun. He had to be in the mine before sunrise, and he didn’t return home until after dark. Like most miners, he was in constant debt to the company store. His future was as black as the coal he mined.

But he and his wife had a dream: to move west and “homestead” a piece of land for themselves and their little boy. Finally, he and his wife determined that it was time to attempt the task. John’s wife took in washing. They scrimped and saved until, at last, they were able to pay their obligation to the company store.

John kissed his wife and son good-bye. He would send for them as soon as he was able. He took a train to Merrill, Wisconsin, and walked twenty-five miles to claim a forty acre tract of land in Ormsby. On his back he carried a fifty pound sack of meal, an axe, and a few essentials. It was July. Mosquitoes were thick, and horsefly bites burned like fire. In the closed-in woods it was unbearably hot and humid. But he rejoiced in his new freedom from the coal dust and semi-slavery of the mines.

He was strong and tough. As soon as he found his tract, he set about felling trees for the log cabin he would build. Watching every penny, he had brought no gloves, believing that the calluses built up in the mines would protect his hands. However, the work was different, and the axe handle wore into his hands at new places. In short time, his hands were bleeding. He missed his wife and son. Insects plagued him. In the heat, his temper grew short.

The second day was unbearable. John gave vent to his pain and frustration. He had never been a profane man, but the woods rang with the sound of his curses and the chopping of his axe. On the morning of the third day, he could barely stand. His spirit and energy were at bottom. The insects, the heat, and his bleeding hands had won. He could take it no longer. He slumped to the ground. He cursed himself that he had ever dreamed of his own log home in the north woods. His shoulders shook, and great sobs racked his body. He cried out to God, “Please help me. I can’t take it any longer.”

For a long time he lay there on the forest floor. He was a beaten man. Then faintly, mingled with the whirl of insects and the quiet forest noises, there was a new sound. John sat up

straight. He strained to hear. Though it came from miles away, there could be no mistake: it was the ring of an axe. Somewhere, another man was felling trees. Another man was dreaming a dream of his own. In spite of insects, bone weariness, and bleeding hands, another father was clearing land and building for the future of his family.

John stood up, grabbed his axe, and went to work. Years later he sat in the log cabin he had built and called his grandchildren around him. He told them a spellbinding story. He recalled how God had answered his prayer during a time of extreme distress. He told them how God had encouraged him with the ring of another man's axe. (*Illustration Digest*, June-August 1991)

When two work together, each is encouraged.

There is something about having friends, people to help, that makes things so much better for you – someone to pick you up when you fall.

When you have fallen and someone reaches down to help with no self-serving interest – they just wanted to help you out – you never forget their kind deed. Ever. Their help is etched in your mind like a foot print in the concrete. You remember the act of kindness. You don't forget.

Two are better than one.

Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo, but what you want is someone who will take the bus with you when the limo breaks down.

Solomon gives us another reason that two are better than one.

II. If two lie down together, they stay warm.

Ecclesiastes 4:11

If two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?

The experience being described by Solomon may sound strange in a suburban congregation in our day. In this day of central heat and central air conditioning in our homes, we may not appreciate what he is describing.

My grandfather told me about how he and all of his brothers slept in the bed together when he was a boy. They laid across the bed – the opposite way that you and I sleep – in order that more brothers could be put in the same bed. He would tell how glad you were to be in the middle on a cold night. Since they had a common interest in keeping a warm, dry bed, the one who wet the bed was spanked by the rest.

If two lie down together, they stay warm!

This is just another way for Kohleth, the preacher, to restate his point. Life is so much better when you have friends to live it with.

At a home for adults who need extra care, one resident who longed to play the piano was no longer able because a stroke had paralyzed the left side of her body. Then one day a new tenant, who also loved to play the piano, was welcomed. A stroke had left the right side of her body paralyzed. The director of the center sat them down on the piano bench, and together they could do what they could no longer do alone. What a picture of working together.

Two are better than one.

The preacher gives us a third reason that two are better than one.

III. Two are better than one when you face the enemy.

Are we not at war? Do we not share a common enemy? Should we not stand side by side as we face the foe?

Can your family stand alone against the power of evil? Of darkness? You cannot.

Can your youth say no to peer pressure without a youth group and a youth minister to support them?

Can you make a stance for Christ at work if you have to stand alone?

As Christians, we must not spend time fighting with each other. We must stand together. The enemy does not want us to stand side by side.

Greek mythology tells of Cadmus who, while searching for his sister, came upon a dragon that blocked his travel. Cadmus fought and killed the fierce dragon. Then he pulled out all the teeth of the savage beast and buried them in a field. The next time he traveled that way, he was surprised to discover that every tooth had become an armed giant. It seemed impossible that he could pass through their midst. How could he overcome them?

He thought of a scheme. While hiding behind a tree, he threw a stone. One of the giants, thinking another giant had struck him, hit him in return. The other giants began to take sides and quarrel. Their fighting escalated and soon involved their weapons. Finally, all the giants were drawn into the fray. Before long, all were dead or wounded. Then Cadmus was able to pass.

This church is full of potential giants. But if Satan can sow seeds of discord and disunity, then we will end up fighting one another. When brothers fight, it gives Satan great pleasure. (*Illustration Digest*)

A threefold cord is not easily broken. With ease, I can snap this single stick in two. Exerting the same force, however, I can't even bend these three sticks of the same diameter. If you don't believe me, come up at the end of the service and see if you can break these three.

Two are better than one.

You need a friend. You need a church family.

**To all who need comfort;
To all who want friendship;
To those who desire acceptance;
To all who want sheltering love;
To those who sin and need a Savior;
And whosoever will come – this church opens wide its doors,
and in the name of our Lord says, WELCOME!**

Who did you think of?
What kind of friend have you been?

Proverbs 18:24
...there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

John 15:13
Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.