

Together with God

REFLECT

If you heard Pastor David's sermon this weekend, reflect on what you learned (there is a note section in your journal to write down what you are learning from the sermon series). *If you would like to view this weeks message you can do so at www.fmcm.org/media.*

- What were your biggest takeaways from the sermon?
- Were there specific points that God was speaking to you about that you would like to share with the group?
- Were there any specific actions that the Spirit prompted you to take as you listened to the sermon?

READ GOD'S WORD TOGETHER

Ecclesiastes 4:1-12

Read together Ecclesiastes 4:1-12. After reading the passage together, consider the following points and questions:

- The book of Ecclesiastes is the record of a search for meaning in life by a person the book identifies as "The Teacher" (Eccl. 1:1). The Teacher takes the reader on a journey through all of the things that are typically called upon to give meaning to our lives, and at each stop along the way he finds the pursuit of these things to be ultimately a meaningless pursuit. What are some of the things that the Teacher identifies as meaningless in Ecclesiastes 4:1-8?
- Browse through Ecclesiastes 2 (you don't need to read through the whole chapter). What are some other pursuits that the Teacher found meaningless?
- What are some things that our contemporary culture would have us pursue that, likely in the end, will turn out to be empty pursuits?
- One particular empty pursuit that the Teacher observes in Ecclesiastes 4 is that "envy of neighbor" (Eccl. 4:4) is often at the heart of what we see as achievement. Building bigger houses, advancing careers, having more toys are, from this perspective, driven by the exact opposite of the command to "love your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:18 and Mark 12:31). This is, of course, a general observation (not universally true for everyone), but how have you seen this to ring true in our wider culture or even in your own life?

- The outcome of this kind of pursuit reaches its sad conclusion in "the man all alone" in Ecclesiastes 4:7-8 who fills his life with the "miserable business" of endless toil. Think for a moment of the way we often respond when asked "How was your day?" What is your common response? How does this mirror the way this "man all alone" might answer that question and what does this say about the loneliness that so often afflicts our culture (you can review here the stats on loneliness from the introduction to this study)?
- What are some other factors that drive this growing experience of loneliness in our culture?
- Throughout the Teacher's discoveries of what is meaningless in Ecclesiastes, he stumbles upon a few things that are meaningful. One of these is friendship and community. The Teacher's point that "two are better than one" is illustrated by three scenarios where having a friend would be important: a fall or some kind of injury; being overtaken by weather (in this case the cold of night); and being ambushed by bandits. All of these would be familiar concerns for anyone who was working in the fields or perhaps embarking on a journey in the ancient world of the writer. What circumstances or events in your own life would you not want to face alone?
- What circumstances or events have happened in your life where you discovered this truth that community and friendship (the "cord of three strands" the Teacher describes) is a meaningful gift from God?

Together in Community

The Teacher of Ecclesiastes closes his reflection on friendship by noting that "a cord of three strands is not quickly broken." Yet why is it a cord of three strands? Part of this has to do with the technology of rope-making and the strength that multiple cords provide to a rope. But, perhaps there is another reason as well.

- Read Matthew 18:18-20 and John 17:20-25. Then compare these passages to this description of Ecclesiastes 4:12 by the commentator Matthew Henry: "Two together are a threefold cord; where two are closely joined in holy love and fellowship, Christ will by his Spirit come to them...then there is a threefold cord that can never be broken." What difference should it make for your group that when you meet together in Christ's