

## CLOUDY DAYS 4: MEANINGLESS ISOLATION

### SERIES RECAP

- Welcome to Week 4 of **Cloudy Days**! Life can feel chaotic and meaningless at times. Focusing on things “under the sun” (without God), clouds our judgment.
- BUT if we change our perspective and look to our God above the sun and clouds, we can grow to accept that life is out of our control but not out of God’s.
- Ecclesiastes is one of the Bible’s five wisdom books. Throughout the book, the author presents lessons taught by a Teacher. So far, we have examined the Teacher’s thoughts on “Hebel” – the things we chase in life that never fully satisfy.
- We’ve already seen how **the pursuit of pleasure** and **the pursuit of power + wealth** never fulfills us as much as we hope. They disappoint even after we’ve achieved them.

### INTRO

- To face life’s disappointment, people **ISOLATE**. Sometimes we convince ourselves it’s better to be safe and alone rather than let down by others or let others down ourselves.
- BUT looking out just for yourself – with no one to look out for you and no one to look out for – dissatisfies the soul. Hopelessness abounds in isolation, more and more hebel.
- In **Ecclesiastes 4**, the Teacher presents another example of Hebel: that of a man who builds wealth for only himself. (*Read Ecclesiastes 4:7-8*) A rich life, without community, has only disappointed the man. (*Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12*)
- **HERE’S OUR BIG IDEA: RESIST ISOLATION. GROW IN FRIENDSHIP.**
- *Discussion Question: As we begin our conversation on friends, who was your first friend? How did you meet? Did you ever have to stand up for each other?*

### BIBLE PASSAGE

- As we read, a life spent hustling alone – in the view of the Teacher – is meaningless. Working tirelessly without friends or community only makes the work longer and less fulfilling.
- Having even one **True Friend**, the Teacher believes, will do wonders for a person. Specifically, the Teacher presents **FOUR Ways True Friends Level Up Life**.

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| <p>9 <i>Two people are better off than one, for they <b>can help each other succeed.</b></i> (NLT)</p> <p>9 <i>Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: (NIV)</i></p>   | <p><b>FRIENDS TEAM UP.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ In the NIV translation, this verse says two people, “have a good return for their labor.” Dividing work among two people who work well together, helps each finish a task in less time and with less stress.</li> <li>→ A good friend is a good teammate, willing to team up and share the load to achieve mutual success.</li> <li>→ <i>Discussion Question: What does your dream project partner or teammate look like? Is it someone who does all the work, someone who expects you to do it all, or someone who collaborates equally? What does this reveal about the type of friendship you value?</i></li> <li>→ <b>Application:</b> Friends count on each other to collaborate. Do your part of the project. Help a friend whose burnt out catch up on tasks that are weighing them down. Be a good teammate. Look for, and be, this friend.</li> </ul>   |
| <p>10 <i>If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. (NLT)</i></p> <p><b>Proverbs 18:24</b> – There are “friends” who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother.</p> | <p><b>FRIENDS PICK YOU UP.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ We have all fallen before and will certainly fall again. Thankfully, friends pick friends up when they’re down.</li> <li>→ <i>Discussion Question: Define “fall.” Define “reach out.” Was a friend ever there to help when you “fell”? Have you ever been the friend to “reach out”?</i></li> <li>→ Reaching out can be uncomfortable. Accepting help isn’t always easy either. Pride and shame can get in the way.</li> <li>→ By gently helping a friend out of whatever pit they’ve landed in – anxiety, depression, or unwavering guilt – we can be human reflections of God’s love and care.</li> <li>→ <b>Application:</b> Friends don’t kick each other when they are down. So help a friend out of darkness and into light. Gently speak the truth when someone is drowning in lies. If you are in the dark + lies, accept the help of people nearby – don’t reject it. Look for, and be, this friend.</li> </ul> |
| <p>11 <i>Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? (NLT)</i></p>  | <p><b>FRIENDS CHEER YOU UP.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ A friendless life is a cold life, according to the Teacher. Friends warm and encourage the heart, resulting in joy, comfort, and ease.</li> </ul>   |

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| <p><b>Proverbs 12:25</b> – <i>Worry weighs a person down; an encouraging word cheers a person up.</i></p> <p>(See also Hebrews 10:25 and 1 Thessalonians 5:11)</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Proverbs says that worry weighs a person down, but an encouraging word cheers them up. Time and time again, in the Old Testament and New, believers are instructed to encourage one another, to build one another up.</li> <li>→ <b>Discussion Question:</b> <i>What is a gesture from a friend or loved one that warmed your heart? Why do you think it had that effect?</i></li> <li>→ <b>Application:</b> <i>Friends mutually benefit from each other's encouragement, in good times and bad. So comfort a grieving friend. Resist comparison and cheer on others' successes. Give the compliment. Warm hearts with kind, sincere words. Look for, and be, this friend.</i></li> </ul>  |
| <p>12 A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but <b>two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better</b>, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken. (NLT)</p> <p><b>Proverbs 17:17</b> – <i>A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.</i></p> | <p><b>FRIENDS BACK YOU UP.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Even before they help pick us up when we've fallen, good friends help to prevent the fall in the first place.</li> <li>→ Friends bring safety and security, offering an ally in the battle for our minds and hearts. Two are undoubtedly stronger against an enemy than one. (<a href="#">See Star Wars.</a>)</li> <li>→ Facing adversity – in this case the onslaught of stressors, pressure, and lies culture feeds us all daily – helps to turn friends to brothers and sisters.</li> <li>→ <b>Discussion Question:</b> <i>Do you have a triple-braided cord? Two friends who back you up in the fight for faith?</i></li> <li>→ <b>Application:</b> <i>Friends spur each other on further into good works and love. They help to hold each other up when one is weak and defend against attacks. So stick by your friends. Grow together in spirit and in truth.</i></li> </ul> |

- **IN CLOSING**, Jesus commanded us to be good friends. *John 15:12-14* “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.
- It is through our friendship with Christ that life gains meaning and by his example that we pursue meaningful relationships with others.
- **RESIST ISOLATION. GROW IN FRIENDSHIP.** Measure friendships not by quantity but quality. Be wise, make friends and be a friend.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*(If you didn't use the discussion questions during the lesson, you can also use those now!)*

- Fav movie/TV friendship – GO! Why do you think their friendship resonates with you?
- What do we do when friendships turn unhealthy? What are some warning signs of this and ways to possibly correct it?
- What are some character traits you are looking for in a friend? How can we grow in developing these traits?