

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: [10] If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! [11] Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? [12] Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Eccles. 4:9-12



Ever come across a beautiful flower in the woods among what seems to be decay and rotten vegetation? I have. Lady's slippers are known for this. One afternoon while I was taking a walk along one of the many trails that surround Massabesic lake I ran across such a flower. Buried amongst what seemed to be nothing but decay was this beautiful flower. Friendship can be like that. I think Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 is such a "flower." Nestled amongst all the gloom and doom of the emptiness and frustration of this life, especially for sinners who do not know Christ is this wonderful relationship between two or more folks called friendship. I want to take the time this morning to remind ourselves that we need friendship - we need to nourish friendships - we need to value friendships. So let's look at our passage and then apply other passages to this wonderful "goodness" that God has provided for the sinner and saved alike: friendship.

Friendship Can Make a Life Productive.

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:..."
Ecccl 4:9.

God said in the very beginning:

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Genesis 2:18.¹ We were created to have companionship - in this case the companionship would come from the close union that comes from marriage. Life with friends are much more productive. What do I mean by productive? Alone, a man or woman can survive and actually do well, especially in the workplace, but at the end of life friendships make that life, not only more bearable but can give it wonderful legacy. I think there is something else we can derive from this passage and that is this - it takes an investment of trust and *labor* to foster and maintain friendship. The word "good *return*" refers to the reward that one receives by putting in the labor of fostering and maintaining a friendship.

One place that friendships should come from is our friends in school. This is where

¹ Unless otherwise noted all passages are NIV.

we foster friendships in our most formative years. Over the years I can honestly say that my friends, especially in college, were very important in my own journey to maturity. It's almost like we in our friendships were "lurching uncontrollably²" through life's lessons on how to grow up. Another source for friendships are our relationship with our parents or children - yes, there can be a close friendship between dad and son, mom and daughter or any combination of the above. In fact, at some point in the developing relationship between parent and "child" friendship *has* to be the basis of on growing maturity of both the parent and the child. And finally the ultimate friendship come from our marriage. After the initial rush of the hormones and whatever romantic inclinations that might come out of the joining of a man and woman there should be the abiding friendship that surpasses all other friendships. This was the actual context of our passage in Genesis "it is not good that man should be alone..." Marriage is an enduring friendship.

Friendship Is an Uplifting Relationship.

If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Eccl. 4:10.

I don't know about you but I can really be down - sometime for no apparent reason. The workplace is not always a "picnic." I have a friend at work who has a sixth sense when I am having a difficult time. Several times my friend Nunzio has stopped by and asked how things are going - not a frivolous "how's it going" but he has caught something in my look or the way I carry myself in the hallway that has put up a "red flag" that I am having a difficult day. I can remember one occasion where I was really down about a task that seemed near impossible and that I felt all alone in and he knocked on the door of the lab and asked that question - after my dumping my concern on him his comment was that my boss wouldn't have given the task to me if he did not think that I could do it. Now most folks having said that would have completely discouraged me but when Nunzio said it in the context of our friendship - it gave me the boost that I needed to successfully complete the task.

We are not talking about blind allegiance in a friendship but an honesty and transparency that will allow one friend to help his friend through a difficulty no matter how impossible the situation might be. **We really need to be open to the opportunities of friendships as they afford themselves. We cannot afford to "blow off" opportunities of friendships - for that very potential friend might just be the only one who can help us up when we need a boost in life.** Friendship can bring joy and honest, trustworthy counsel to each other. Here are a couple of word-pictures of friendship.

² A term used by the host in The McLaughlin Group for coming to a correct conclusion without apparent rationale.

Friendship is like perfume.

Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel. Proverbs 27:9-10

We need to understand that in Solomon's time there was no "RightGuard." So perfume and incense was meant to make a person pleasant to be around. We really cannot afford to be "standoffish" in our fostering of friendships. Friendships are like a pleasant perfume, bringing a sense of well-being to one and making us pleasant to be around. Part of a good friendship is the openness and transparency that is an important quality of that friendship. Who else but our friends can we come to when we have a difficult, personal "growing up" issue that we are facing and we don't really want to deal with? It is our closest friends who are caring enough to confirm our fears that we have fallen short in an area of our lives and it is the "earnest counsel" that will bring us through. The original has this valuable counsel springing up from the soul.

Friendship is like a deep well.

Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out. [6] Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find? Proverbs 20:5-6, KJV.

Oh! This is a wonderful passage. We all have "plans" deep within our hearts - plans are not some idea we are hatching for the day but our aspirations - our hopes - our *fears* - what thoughts that are "rattling around" in our hearts that we are not inclined to share with others. They may be deep within the wells of our hearts but a friend is sensitive to those plans and can share in them with us. *And* we are not afraid to share with our friends. How many times have we met someone in the hallways of church or the workplace and been greeted with "how's it going?" We in no way would be inclined to draw up from our soul-well what really is on our minds but not so with a friend who really knows the inner workings of our hearts and will be perceptive and will be skillful in drawing those thoughts up with the implication that both will be refreshed and renewed by the sharing experience.

The Friendship of Marriage.

"...Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?..." Eccles. 4:11.

There is no other friendship that touches the inner parts of the soul than the friendship of marriage. Marriage is not merely a legal relationship that is sanctioned by the state. No. Marriage is the bonding of two souls and bodies into one. That is the

meaning of Genesis 2:24. The concept of becoming one flesh is not merely the biological sexual function, but is the uniting of two - a man and a woman in such a way that the union makes them one. This union has been crafted by the Lord³ in no less a way than the Lord's creative action in weaving us in our mother's womb.⁴ It is that much of a creative act by the Lord - the original meaning of "helper" as found in Genesis 2:18. Helper means to one who helps their spouse and thus completes the partner. I'd like to step outside the direct exegetical conclusion a little bit and imply that this relationship, apart from submission issues, works both ways. A husband and wife complete each other because that is the Lord's design and creative act in marriage. Each marriage is the joining of two souls and bodies by the creative act of the Lord himself. The wife in her submissiveness helps and completes her husband and the husband in his protection, love and provision helps his wife. What a wonderful friendship marriage can be.

Peter used a wonderful term that was foreign to the Roman world of his day when he commanded the husband to dwell *intimately* with his wife:

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

1 Peter 3:7, KJV.

This concept of an intimate relationship between husband and wife was completely foreign to the way of the Roman world - but God's original design was for the forging of two souls within the context of intimacy *and* heirs together of the *grace of life*. The grace of life here should not be passed over in a superficial way. NIV has the phrase "gift of life." **I suggest that this is the life that comes out of the marriage union.**⁵

³ **"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' [5] and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? [6] So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."** Matthew 19:4-6.

⁴ **For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.** Psalm 139:13.

⁵ Most Bible students I know of apply the phrase "Gift (Grace) of life" to the common gift of *eternal* life that two saved partners enjoy. I think the phrase embraces a broader term referring to the general term of life *including* the life that the union between two married spouses enjoy and the special blessing that comes from two partners who *are* saved. Otherwise we must exclude the union between an unsaved and a saved spouse, which I think dilutes the whole intent of this and other passages referring to the marriage union. Read Proverbs 5 especially vs.' 15 - 20.

We are no longer an island - we have been given the gift of life that comes out of God's creative act of uniting a man and a woman into one *life*.

This is the friendship that springs out the marriage union. All of the images that come out of a biblical definition of friendship can be applied to the marriage relationship but to a greater intensity because of this creation of the marriage life.

Some Final Examples of Friendships from God's Word.

Here are some examples of friendships from God's word:

- [David and Mephibosheth] 2 Samuel 9:1-13 **Friends remember their commitments to each other.**
- [Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and Jesus] Luke 10:38-42: **Friends can be open and frank with each other without fear of estrangement.**
- [Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and Jesus] Luke 10:38-42: **Friends can be open and frank with each other without fear of estrangement.**
- [Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus] Philip 2:19-20; Philip 2:22; Philip 2:25 Philip. 2:25-28: **Friends show more than a cursory interest in each other's needs.**
- Paul and Philemon: **Friends can work out difficult situations.** Philemon 1:7-10
- Proverbs 27:6 **The "wounds" of friends are always beneficial and can be trusted.**
- Proverbs 18:24 **Friends can be more intimate reliable than family members.**
- Proverbs 17:17 **Friends accept each other even when the "warts" are obvious.**
- Proverbs 11:13 **Friends can be trusted with each other's secrets.**