

1. Last week we began a series titled **Better Together**.
2. It is based on **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**. Turn there if you would like and we'll come back to it in a minute.
3. We laid the groundwork for this series last week by identifying that relationships are not meant to be disposable. Things that are disposable are things that can be easily discarded.
4. I believe we live in a fairly disposable society. In years past there was an entire industry dedicated to repairing things. TVs. Radios. Toasters. VCRs.
5. Today, with many of those items and a whole lot more, it is easier and cheaper just to throw the thing away and buy a new one.
6. And it isn't the end of the world if that happens to some electronic device. But it is very dangerous when we take that same attitude with the people we are meant to be close to.
7. Relationships are valuable. Marriages. Friendships. Family. All of these relationships are meant to be treated as valued and cherished rather than something that can be thrown away and replaced.
8. Solomon in the Old Testament, in spite of his heart having moved away from God. In spite of analyzing life and wrongly coming to the conclusion that life was just meaningless, still knew that we are better together than we are alone.
9. He said it this way. **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12** Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: **10** If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them 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.
10. Each week I am giving you a word to latch onto that describes why Solomon believed that two are better than one. Last week that word was **multiplication**.
11. Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. That's multiplication.
12. We described multiplication like this. The process of combining two things to produce something greater.
13. Growth. Enlargement. Expansion. Extension. Elevation. Addition. Augmentation. Magnification. Intensification.

14. Why are two better than one? Because when one person works by himself, there is a limit to what can be accomplished. He is limited to what he alone can do.
15. But when two people work together. What is produced together, is greater than what could be produced alone.
16. I love the story of the four men in Mark chapter 2 who climbed up on the roof of a jam-packed house, dug a hole in the roof, and with ropes, lowered their friend who was paralyzed down to Jesus.
17. Alone, this man would have never come to Jesus and been healed. But with the help of his friends, together the success of their mission was multiplied, and the man was not only healed, but he experienced salvation as well.
18. What a powerful picture of what each and every one of us need. We need to be in committed and intimate relationships. In this case friendships. These were the man's friends, not his family.
19. So that in our time of need we have someone to help carry us to Jesus, and in the time of need of our friend, we are there to help them to Jesus.
20. You see, sometimes I need to be holding a rope for someone else, and other times I need to be on the mat being lowered by my friends to the savior.
21. That's exactly why Satan gets great joy out of disrupting and damaging our relationships. He loves to cause friction between us and the people we need most, and then sit back and watch while we destroy one another rather than fighting him.
22. We ended last week with the very pointed question. It's the same question I want to spring from this week.
23. What load are you lifting, that is wearing you out, to the point that maybe you have even considered quitting all together, that God never intended you to carry because you have not placed enough value on togetherness.
24. What load is about to take you under all because you mistakenly believed that going it alone is better, when the truth is, together is better?

25. That leads us to verse number 10. Let's read it.

**TEXT:** **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10** Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: **10** If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.

So the word that I want to attach to today's message is the word...

**TITLE:** **Preservation.**

**INTRO:**

1. I chose the word preservation because it really is a powerful concept as it relates to relationships and the truth that we are better together.
2. My first thought about the word preservation was as a kid growing up watching my mom can fruits and vegetables. Green beans. Squash. Pickles. Peppers. You name it.
3. During the summer garden season, the counters at home would be full of mason jars and the screw on lids.
4. What she did for hours on end, that we don't do much of anymore, is she took something that in its natural state, with no intervention, would spoil. It would rot.
5. But the process of canning that vegetable or fruit or whatever, preserved it so it would be good for a very long time.
6. Without help, its lifespan was very short. But with help its lifespan was extended greatly.
7. Preservation. If we apply that word preservation to other things, like the relationship between two people, it takes on a whole new meaning.
8. Preservation also means to protect. Care for. Safeguard. To uphold. Sustain. To keep or keep up. To perpetuate or continue on.
9. That is what I see when I read Solomon's thoughts in verse 10.
10. **Ecclesiastes 4:10** If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.
11. So let's first talk about the very obvious, physical meaning of this verse. Two people are better than one, because if one of them falls down they will have help in getting back up. But pity. Or feel sorry for the person who falls, and doesn't have anyone to help them up.

12. I have to tell you; I am no stranger to falling down.
13. I had hoped by this stage in my life I would not be experiencing falls, and yet I still do.
14. We live out in the country, and though I have lived in the country most of my life, I have never seen so many wasps or dirt daubers as we have around our house.
15. One night we looked out on the front porch and the light fixture was so covered by wasps that the fixture wasn't even visible.
16. Several weeks back I went out to the shop one Saturday morning and was stung in the back of the head by a wasp, and then later realized there was a nest right above the door.
17. So now I make sure to not go out of the house without a can of wasp and hornet spray in one hand, and something to swat wasps in the other hand.
18. Three weeks ago I went out to the shop and noticed the wasps again, so I sprayed them from a distance and then stood back while they did their thing.
19. However, they started to come flying out of the nest, and because I was spooked from having been stung before, I started back-peddling to get away, and in the process, I stumbled and fell backwards in the middle of a gravel road.
20. I had road rash on my back and my left arm. I was so bruised on my left side I couldn't lay on that side when sleeping.
21. I'm laying there on my back, trying to figure out what just happened, and thought, I need to get up because the wasps might be coming.
22. So I stood up, but then realized my glasses had flown off my face when I fell. I couldn't see a thing. And I needed to find my glasses, but I was afraid if I moved, I would step on them and break them.
23. So there I stand. Hurting from falling. Wasps flying around. Can't see one blessed thing, and I'm afraid to move.
24. And on top of that, no one was home. I was all alone.
25. How many can identify with my story? How many of you are now feeling pretty good about yourself right about now? At least I'm not as clumsy as pastor.

26. So, Solomon uses this very clear mental picture, the physical idea of falling. Because a person falling is something we can wrap our mind around.
27. But what if verse number 10 isn't so much about falling physically, but is intended to describe many other ways we can fall as human beings?
28. What if the word fall is something that is meant to describe falling spiritually? Mentally? Emotionally?
29. What if the word fall describes losing sight of the truth and as a result losing hope?
30. I believe it actually does mean all of those things, and probably many more. But for the sake of time, I want to point out three instances in the bible that describe, not a physical fall, but a different kind of fall.

### **Pride.**

1. Remember our word of the day to help us identify is preservation.
2. Listen to what the book of Proverbs has to say. Proverbs 16:17-18 The highway of the upright avoids evil; those who guard their ways preserve their lives. 18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.
3. There's that word preserve, and there is the word fall.
4. The writer of Proverbs says that the highway or pathway of the upright or righteous avoids evil. And to avoid evil is to guard or preserve your life.
5. But then in verse 18 we see the opposite. Rather than preserving life, in verse 18 we see the falling of life. And the thing, in this case, that can destroy us or make us fall is pride.
6. Pride is this interesting little word. As I searched for the definition of the word pride, I was caught by surprise.
7. Initially, everything I found placed pride in a positive light. And there is a positive side to pride.
8. But the writer of Proverbs in this case wasn't thinking of pride as a positive, he was describing a type of pride that destroys. That causes us to fall.

9. So after I dug a bit, then I came upon the definition that matched proverbs. **Pride: the quality of having an excessively high opinion of oneself or one's importance.**
10. Pride is looking in the mirror and thinking, boy I sure am good. I sure do have it all together.
11. Pride is getting around others and thinking you are better than them, which causes you to be judgmental.
12. Pride is taking a healthy view of yourself and almost elevating your opinion of yourself to that of a god if you will. You feel like you deserve.
13. It's been said you can tell whether a person is dealing with pride by how they respond to having to wait for something. If they respond angrily because they had to wait for something, it is a sign that they think they are too good to have to wait for anything.
14. That sure is a problem with relationships because it makes a person demanding and hard to live with.
15. But what about our relationship with God? If we start acting with God like we are too good to have to wait for anything; don't we really elevate ourselves above him? I know what is better for me God than you do.
16. That is a fall. But if we go back to the book of Ecclesiastes, we see a solution to this type of potential fall.
17. You see pride pushes people away from us. But when we have somebody who loves us and cares for us. And wants us to be healthy and whole more than they want us to be a little god. They can help us with the fall.
18. They can say hey. You know I love you. But your attitude is a little bit off. You're pushing people away with your pride.
19. Maybe that's what Solomon was thinking about when he said two is better than one.
20. How about...

### **Losing sight of the truth.**

1. In the book of Psalms, chapter 73. We see clear evidence of an internal conflict. The conflict was that the writer wanted to believe that God was good and taking care of him and everything else.

2. But he begins to look around at people who are practicing and doing evil things. But what throws him off is that he sees that they are arrogant, they are wicked, they are prideful.
3. But they seem to have no worries. He looked at them and said...they prosper. They have no struggles. They are healthy and strong. They are free from common human burdens.
4. And the sight of them living a carefree life while he had difficulties and hardships and trials was pulling him down. Actually the word down is the exact word to describe his condition.
5. Psalm 73:2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.
6. What a vivid description of his state of mind. This thing was messing me up so badly that my feet almost slipped and I almost fell.
7. Haven't we all been there?
8. Haven't we all been neck deep in troubles and trials? And we're doing our best to live for God. But it seems like people who don't care about God one bit are doing better than we are.
9. Man, that is a perfect place for a fall. But the writer found hope.
10. Psalms 73:16-17 When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply 17 till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.
11. I was troubled and in distress, until I entered the sanctuary of God. Listen to how one bible commentator described the sanctuary of God.  

The tabernacle or house of God, where the Word of God was read and explained, prayer was made, and sacrifices offered up, and where fellowship was had with the saints, and communion with God himself; which for one hour or moment is preferable to all the prosperity of the wicked, during their whole life.
12. What brought him out of this deep funk he was in? He prayed. He read the word of God. But where did he do it? He did those things in the sanctuary with other believers.
13. It was those things and the fellowship he had with other believers that brought him back to the truth. That helped him see things more clearly.
14. I wonder if that was what Solomon was thinking when he said two are better than one because they can help each other up?
15. One final thought. How about slipping into...

## Disobedience.

1. In the book of Leviticus, near the end, after God has proclaimed to the children of Israel how much he wants to bless them and honor them as a result of their obedience.
2. He then turns their attention to what disobedience brings. **Leviticus 26:36-37** "As for those of you who are left, I will make their hearts so fearful in the lands of their enemies that the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight. They will run as though fleeing from the sword, and they will fall, even though no one is pursuing them. **37** They will stumble over one another as though fleeing from the sword, even though no one is pursuing them. So you will not be able to stand before your enemies.
3. What we see here is clear evidence that the result of disobedience is that they will not be able to stand before their enemies. They will not be comfortable. They will not be protected. Which is another way of saying preserved.
4. And the craziest result of disobedience is that they will stumble and fall, trying to run away from imaginary things that they believe are chasing them.
5. But not wanting to leave them hopeless, God shows them a way back to him. It's through repentance.
6. **Leviticus 26:40-42** "But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors--their unfaithfulness and their hostility toward me, **41** which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies--then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, **42** I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.
7. So if we were to put into words what their repentance brings, maybe we would say through repentance they are no longer falling. But now they are standing strong.
8. But how do we come to repentance? **Galatians 6:1-2** Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. **2** Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
9. Man, I believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin. But the Holy Spirit isn't the only thing that brings about repentance.



10. Repentance comes as we live in a place of being accountable to one another. Of living in a place where we give others permission to speak into our lives.
11. Repentance comes as we value doing life together, rather than acting like our spiritual life is nobody else's business. (pause)
12. I wonder if that is what Solomon was thinking when he said two are better than one because they can help one another up?

### Conclusion:

1. I have always had a bit of difficulty figuring out how Ecclesiastes 4:10 jives with Psalm 37:23-24.
2. Again. Ecclesiastes 4:10 says that if either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.
3. But then this is what we find in Psalm 37:23-24 The LORD makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; 24 though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand.
4. So the rub is this. The promise is that the Lord makes firm the steps. Though he may stumble he will not fall. Because the Lord upholds him with his hand.
5. So if that is true, then why have I gone through experiences in life that seem to be the opposite of that?
6. Well, we need to be aware that the promise in Psalm 73 comes with a condition. The verse doesn't make those promises to everyone. The promise is to those who delight in the Lord.
7. So it is a devotion and a love for the Lord that brings about the safeguard the verse promises. The preservation we so desperately need.
8. But what if when it says that the Lord upholds him with his hand, that the hand the Lord uses is the hand of someone close to us.
9. What if the Lord's upholding of us is God's hand in the hand of others?
10. What if God's upholding hand is like the friends of the paralyzed man? The Lord used their hands to help lift, and sustain, and preserve their friend.

11. What if we have been falling because we haven't placed the proper value in our need of others?
12. As we close today, I believe the Lord wants to minister to those who have or are falling. Maybe you are stumbling, and your footing isn't too sure.
13. Maybe there is a struggle you have been experiencing, and you just need a lift from a brother or sister in Christ. Prayer.
14. Have people make small groups to pray for one another. Confess, if you have a need let the others in your group pray so they can pray for you.
15. Sing. Bind us together.