

The Saddest Goose (Our Daily Bread)

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Ecclesiastes 4:12

Scripture

9Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. 10If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. 11Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? 12A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NLT)

Insight

The author of Ecclesiastes uses practical illustrations that show the importance of companionship. Looking at verse 9, we learn that two “have a good return for their labor.” This verse points back to verse 8 which explains that it’s meaningless and miserable to toil for oneself. Not only do two have a better return, but two can help each other in multiple ways.

In the illustration of one person falling down, many commentators believe it refers to a serious fall (v. 10). In that time, it was common to dig pits and cover them to trap animals. Falling into one could cause injury and being left alone could be fatal. Additionally, roads were dangerous in the ancient Near East, and two could better defend themselves against robbers and other attacks. The author’s conclusion that “a cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (v. 12) emphasizes the need for companionship.

Reflection

Why is there a football in the parking lot? I wondered. But as I got closer, I realized the greyish lump wasn’t a football: it was a goose—the saddest Canada goose I’d ever seen.

Geese often congregate on the lawn near my workplace in the spring and fall. But today there was only one, its neck arched back and its head tucked beneath a wing. Where are your buddies? I thought. Poor thing was all alone. It looked so lonely, I wanted to give it a hug. (Note: don’t try this.)

I’ve rarely seen a goose completely alone like my lonesome feathered friend. Geese are notably communal, flying in a V-formation to deflect the wind. They’re made to be together.

As human beings, we were created for community too (see Genesis 2:18). And in Ecclesiastes 4:10, Solomon describes how vulnerable we are when we’re alone: “Pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.” There’s strength in numbers, he added, for “though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (v. 12).

This is just as true for us spiritually as it is physically. God never intended for us to “fly” alone, vulnerably isolated. We need relationships with each other for encouragement, refreshment, and growth (see also 1 Corinthians 12:21). During these extraordinary days, due to the Covid-19 virus many of us have needed to practice physical distancing to help contain the disease. But how we look forward to the time we can meet face-to-face with our local church families again!

Together, we can stand firm when life’s headwinds gust our way. Together.

Reflect & Pray

What kinds of circumstances tempt you to go it alone? Who do you know who could use a word of encouragement from you?

Loving God, help us to remember that You never meant us to fly solo, but together with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Today, help us to see and support someone in need of encouragement.