

Sermon: **UNAVAILABLE: Needing Friends**

Text: *Ecclesiastes 4:1-12 (664)*

Date: Sept 21, 2014

Location: Northwest Community Church

INTRODUCTION

Last year a group called lifeboat commissioned a study on friendship in America. They surveyed over a thousand adults. Their conclusion was that we are in the midst of a national friendship crisis. 75% of Americans are not satisfied with their friendships. The average American adult reports having only one real friend. The results of this study last year are similar to other studies that have shown that 25% of adults have no one to confide in. The survey showed that 65% of people in urban areas are looking for friends who are fun, 18% are looking for friends who can help get them ahead and 18% are looking for friends who are attractive. People who go to church regularly tend to be much more satisfied with their friendships than those who don't. And here's a an interesting finding... facebook has zero effect on our satisfaction with friendships. So those who regularly post a selfie with their breakfast plate aren't any more likely to have good friendships. And 2-1 people said they would prefer deeper friendships over more friendships.

Most people don't need convincing that having friends is a good idea. Study after study has shown that stronger friendships result in a happy, healthier life. So I think most of us get that. But there is obviously a long distant between desiring stronger friendships and doing something to actually make it happen. And so like in our video promo we put off relationships. We make them a low priority...and we suffer for it.

And let me just be honest and transparent with you. My life has been so absorbed with caring for a new baby that I feel like a terrible friend right now. So, even in approaching this topic I felt inadequate but also challenged and hopeful. I know someday in the near future, I'll get to enjoy adult conversation that doesn't involve talking to someone slobbering and smiling and pulling at my hair.

Let me also say that we are talking about this topic today because we are heading into a new season of small groups here at Northwest. I'm hoping over this two week series that you will see how important relationships are to God and how we were meant to have deep friendships.

READ *Ecclesiastes 4:1-12 (664)*

So we just read an example of wisdom literature in Scripture. The most common examples are found in the Proverbs. But this is life wisdom that is in sync with God's wisdom. It's tried and true advice that is thousands of years old. This little book of Ecclesiastes is attributed to King Solomon who according to Scripture was one of the wisest men who ever lived. It's an odd little letter. You can imagine a guy going through a mid-life crisis and searching for the true meaning of life. He investigates pleasures, work, wealth...all of the common suspects that people expect to find fulfillment in. At the end of the letter his conclusion after you've gone on this search for significance with him comes down to a very simple statement. *Fear God. Do what he tells you. And that's it.* 12:13

But while he is on this search for finding what is significant, he makes a stop in chapter 4 to talk about how friendship fits into the equation. I want to share 3 things that threaten our friendships that Solomon says should be valued less than friendships. It's amazing how relevant these things are to us in an urban setting in 2014. Work, wealth and a solitary life.

NEEDING FRIENDS MORE THAN CONSTANT WORK

So Solomon says he sees something meaningless under the sun.

There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil... Ecclesiastes 4:8a

He gives us three reasons that constant work without friendships is meaningless. First, in verse 8 he says that there was no end to the work. There was always more to do. Can you relate to that? No matter how much you do, there is always another project or another deadline. I do believe that God values our work and that our work can be a way that we serve and worship God, but work can also become an idol. We were discussing in our Thursday night Bible study that in I John 2, John writes that we shouldn't love the world because it's passing away. We talked about how he used the same word that is used to refer to a self-sacrificing sort of love – agape. So we are to agape God and agape our fellow believers. But, we are not to agape the world...we are not to practice a self-sacrificing love with the world. And the reason is because it's passing away. If we tie ourselves to it, we will pass away with it.

In this city, we agape our work like crazy. We agape it through long hours...we agape it with our weekends. We agape it with our smart phones always connected. But, like Solomon, what we often find after running on that treadmill for a while is that it's just not very fulfilling.

It's not fulfilling because it gets in the way of God. But, Solomon would also say that it's not fulfilling because it tends to disconnect you from relationships. Solomon stops and asks the question in the midst of another endless work week – “who is this all for?” He realizes that the work has disconnected him from relationships and from meaning. Listen to the Message paraphrase of these verses.

I turned my head and saw yet another wisp of smoke on its way to nothingness: a solitary person, completely alone—no children, no family, no friends—yet working obsessively late into the night, compulsively greedy for more and more, never bothering to ask, “Why am I working like a dog, never having any fun? And who cares?” More smoke. A bad business.

So work becomes meaningless when it becomes disconnected from relationships which leads naturally into his next conclusion. That constant work deprives our lives of joy.

And so this message is for that person this morning who has checked out of your relationships so that you can put your head down and push forward in your work. You push, push, push but something inside knows that Solomon's conclusion is true...that this really isn't worth it.

So here's the practical challenge this week. Would you commit to giving 1% of your waking time to friendship this week? That's about an hour and a half. You just say, I'm going to skip a meeting or not work late one evening and call that friend I've been putting off.

NEEDING FRIENDS MORE THAN WEALTH

If you read the book of Ecclesiastes, you see Solomon returning to the subject of wealth over and over again. The question he is seeking to answer is whether wealth helps you find fulfillment in life. The oil giant John D Rockefeller when asked how much money was enough famously said – “just a little bit more.”

The truth is most of us live with the assumption that if we just had a bit more in our bank account that life would have more meaning. And yet, Solomon writes as one of the richest men who ever lived and concludes that wealth isn't all its cracked up to be. With the world at his feet, he concludes that it's meaningless and a miserable business.

Solomon's words maybe hit us in different ways. Some of us in this room have moved beyond a level of living week to week and you are starting to think about the next step...the next career move...the next investment. And so Solomon wants to warn you that building an ever larger bank account isn't going to bring you more fulfillment. In fact, Jesus' advice to those who have resources beyond what they need was in Luke 16:9 to

I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Luke 16:9

Remember Jesus criticized the wealthy man in the parable of Lazarus because he didn't share what he had with poor Lazarus. So if you have significant resources, you have a tremendous opportunity to be generous and in the process to build relationships.

But then there are others here who are living week to week and Solomon's words may seem a little useless to you since the idea of wealth seems so far away. The temptation though is to think that if you were just wealthy that it would make your life better and more meaningful. Solomon would tell you not to believe the lie. That having friendships and people who care about you is more valuable than millions in the bank.

So here is a practical challenge for you. If you have the resources, think of a person that you want to grow closer to and plan and fund an event. Give your resources away as a way to remind yourself that relationships are more valuable than money.

If you don't have a lot of resources, then you are fortunate to live in a town where a lot of stuff is free. I would challenge you to initiate an event with a friend. You serve them by planning it out and figuring out where the free food samples are. It will be a reminder to you that it doesn't take a lot of resources to have a meaningful time with friends.

Rick Warren writes in "The Purpose Driven Life," "I have been at the bedside of many people in their final moments, when they stand on the edge of eternity, and I have never heard anyone say, "Bring me my diplomas! I want to look at them one more time. Show me my awards, my medals, that gold watch I was given." When life on earth is ending, people don't surround themselves with objects. What we want around us is people – people we love and have relationships with. In our final moments we all realize that relationships are what life is all about. Wisdom is learning that truth sooner rather than later. Don't wait until you're on your deathbed to figure out that nothing matters more." – p. 126

NEEDING FRIENDS MORE THAN A LIFE OF SOLITUDE

Finally, Solomon confronts directly one of our cultural values. We value independence. We idolize doing it alone and succeeding. We have sort of a mutual understanding that we come to this city to build a career and move on – not to establish relational roots that could hold us back in the future. And so we prize our anonymity. We might hang out after work with a few people but we keep it shallow so that it doesn't get messy when its time to move on. But, we have the illusion of friendships because we have 600 friends on facebook. On your birthday, you get a hundred birthday wishes from people whose phone beeped and told them it was your birthday.

You can even be a part of this church and stay disconnected. The survey I cited earlier says that what we are really craving is a small core of friends who know us deeply...who are loyal...who we can trust...who will be there in a crisis for us.

And so our culture often says that going it alone is to be admired. But Solomon says "two are better than one." He gives some reasons...

He says that work is more rewarding when in community

He says when we are in crisis, we have someone there to help
He says we are stronger when we have friendships.

There's a reason why the enemy wants you to believe that you are better off alone or at least better off in superficial relationships. The enemy knows that if he can isolate you that he's won half the battle. When you are isolated, he can make you believe all sorts of lies about yourself and God that will go unchecked. A one stranded cord is easily broken. But get that imagery of a rope with three strands wrapped together that is nearly impossible to break.

You need friendships more than you need mobility and anonymity. From the very beginning, God says during his work of creation that it is not good for the man to be alone. (Gen 2:18)

So I want to give you another practical challenge. I want you to write down a few names of people that you want to invest more time with. Now maybe those friends are right here in the church so I want you to consider making a commitment to meet weekly with them in a lifegroup. I know some of you are scared to commit to meeting regularly, but you will never have deeper friendships until you make that investment of ongoing time. It's about 1% of your waking hours each week.

WRAP-UP

One of the things that we maybe don't think about when we come to the Lord's Table is that it's a celebration of the sacrifice of Jesus, but it's also a celebration of friendship...the friendship of his body. We are unified through our Savior and his sacrifice. When we come to this table it is a recommitment of our lives to Christ and his teachings. Christ taught us to love God and love others above all else. You were meant for friendships. Christ had a vision that his church would be a place of love and relationship. As you meditate on his sacrifice today, what needs to change in your life to give more priority to friendships?

End Slide

Need Prayer Today?

See a Pastor or Prayer Team Member with Green Name Tag