

Two Are Better Than One

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Ecclesiastes chapter 4, verse 7. Again, I saw vanity under the sun. One person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil.

And his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?

This also is vanity and an unhappy business. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, and has not another to lift him up.

[1 : 12] Again, if two lie together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him.

A threefold cord is not quickly broken. Verse 13. Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king, who no longer knew how to take advice.

For when he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been poor, I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place.

There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

May God bless the preaching and the hearing of his word. There may be no better word in the English language than the word friend.

[2 : 26] Who doesn't want a friend? Who doesn't need a friend? Who doesn't long for close friends? You know, the hit show, Cheers, and the theme song captures the longing for a previous generation.

Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name. And they're always glad you came. More recently, the 90s sitcom Friends opens with a different song that captures the same longing.

I'll be there for you when the rain starts to pour. I'll be there for you like I've been there before. I'll be there for you. Why? Because you were there for me too.

And the show is based around six friends living in an apartment in New York City, living together through the ups and downs of life. The song and the show capture what we long for.

Perhaps more than anything else, friends who are there for us. Friends who stand with us. Friends who walk with us through life.

[3 : 26] Yet sadly, one of the actors, David Schwimmer, reflecting on the show's success, says, It's a fantasy for a lot of people. Having a group of friends who become like family.

For many, he says, that's all it is. A fantasy. Perhaps that's why we sing about friends so much. I was tracing through all the songs that I knew that referenced friend today.

I mean this week. And just couldn't make a list long enough. Perhaps that's why we watch shows and movies about friends. Because it's a fantasy. A fantasy. Something we long for.

And yet something few of us ever truly experience. In fact, right now, true friendship is more a fantasy than ever before. Statistically speaking.

With the advances of technology, we're more connected than we've ever been before. We can tweet to the masses. We can recruit the likes on Instagram. We can catch up with that weird guy from seventh grade on Facebook.

[4 : 28] We can strap on a headset and play games with people all throughout the world. And these advances are vast and powerful. And they connect us in ways we never could have imagined. Yet the feeling of being alone is more common than ever before.

One recent study reported the number of people Americans discuss important matters with has dropped from three to two over the last 20 years.

Now maybe you may think, well, it's just round, simple numbers, three to two. But that's actually a drastic and dangerous decline. There's a growing consensus.

The number one health crisis facing America is not cancer, obesity, and heart disease. It's loneliness. One Senator, Ben Sasse, says, what's wrong with America starts with one uncomfortable word, loneliness.

Perhaps you're different. Perhaps you have all the friends you need. Perhaps you have those friends who have been with you through the ups and downs. Or perhaps you have your own story of loneliness to share.

[5 : 37] Of a friend who stood by you for years but has gradually grown distant. Of working hard to be a good friend to many only to find yourself without a friend when you're in need.

Of wishing for a friend you could truly confide in. This morning, Solomon continues to muse about the brokenness of life. Three times this passage.

He says, vanity, vanity. Striving after the wind. Yet focuses on one thing that helps ease the pain. Friends. Solomon's not just telling us what to look for in a friend.

But how to be one. So in a word, where we're going is find a few friends and devote yourself to being a good godly friend to them. Find a few friends and devote yourself to being a good godly friend to them.

First point is, no friends is worse. This generation would say, it's the worst. You know, no friends is worse. That's the first thing we see in verses 7 to 8.

[6 : 43] Solomon points out two more vanities under the sun. Now we know what vanity means. Vanity just means it's unproductive. Unfruitful. It doesn't pay off. And so he's pointing out another thing that doesn't pay off.

And let's look down at this first one that he points out in verse 7. He says, I saw a vanity under the sun, a person who has no other. Either son or brother. Yet there's no end to his toil.

And so the person Solomon sees is someone who has no wife. No son. No brother. Solomon sees someone who has no family.

They have no one in their life. They're completely alone. Now this is the first time in this passage we see this emphasis upon numbers. We see the number 2.

It appears in verses 9, 11, and 12. We see the number 1 in verses 10, 11, and 12. But it appears first here that he saw one person. One person.

[7 : 43] There's only one person. There's no one else. One person by himself is a person completely alone. As the 60s song says, one is the loneliest number because it's only one. And so when Solomon sees one person all alone living life by himself, he says, it's vanity. Life is vain if you have no friends.

Life, according to Solomon, life is pointless if you have no friends. But then he immediately points out another vanity.

So he says, I saw one person, verse 7, who has no other. Yet there is no end to his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, for whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?

For whom am I doing all these things? So what he's saying is life is pointless if you have no friends, but it's even worse if you put your head down and don't think about it. Life is pointless if you have no friends, but it's even worse if you never ask why.

[8 : 56] Why? That's what this man does. He just works hard. He puts his head down, right? Work is a good thing. He starts working and never stops.

He embraces long hours and long days. He makes lots of money, but we know. He'll never be satisfied with that. And the cycle keeps going on and on and on.

He's working harder, making more. Working harder, making more. Working even harder, making even more. But he never asks, why am I doing this? What's all this about?

Who is this for? Who am I giving up so much for? The man works so hard, he doesn't take time to ask, what am I doing with my life?

He makes so many sacrifices to work, to make money, to buy things, but he never stops to consider whether it's worth it. So no surprise, Solomon says, that's vanity. That's foolishness.

[10 : 00] But is it vanity because he worked hard and never enjoyed the good life? Is it vanity because he passed up so many pleasures he could have enjoyed?

No. What Solomon's saying, it's vanity because life is pointless if you don't have friends. The idea, life is pointless if you don't have friends. The idea is, if we're all going to die, which he's made very clear.

If wisdom and pleasures and riches will never satisfy, then one sure way we can experience gain and life under the sun is sharing life with friends.

To put it another way, life is only meaningful when shared. Life is only meaningful when shared. If we're all going to die of wisdom and pleasures and riches will not satisfy, then one sure way we're going to experience gain and life is through sharing life with friends.

And at its most basic level, friendship comes down to sharing. I love C.S. Lewis. He says, friendship begins with what? You too? I thought I was the only one.

[11 : 07] I love the way he captures that. Maybe you begin talking and find out the guy next to you loves Harry Potter or the girl next to you loves Laura Ingalls Wilder.

Maybe you find that he likes golf or running or Russian novels or home renovations. Maybe you find that she has a sense of humor or likes swimming or history or farming or essential oils.

Immediately you find something in common and you're off to the races, right? You have this connection. You have something you share that begins to rub off between you. In fact, recently I read a fascinating book talking about addiction.

And one author was telling her story of overcoming addiction. Now, she was an author before she wrote the book about coming over addiction.

She was a fantasy author. So, here's this lady who's, who's, who's, who's famous, who's trying to write stories that have never been told. People that no one has ever met. Things that have never been seen.

[12 : 11] But when coming through Alcoholics Anonymous, she noticed that addiction, this is her line, is a story, is always a story that has already been told. Her insight in this was fascinating to me.

Our culture wants us to believe that our stories, our lives are a story and that we must tell a story that is new, original, and different in order for our story to make sense in this world, in order to be hip and important.

But in AA, she said, the most powerful stories are the ones we share in common. So, as she went through AA, this fantasy author says, week in, week out, she heard stories about stumbling.

She heard stories about a few drinks that led to a few more. She heard stories about a few more drinks that led to a weekend binge and led to reaching out for help.

Those were the stories that helped. Because those were the stories that everyone shared. It made putting down a drink a little bit easier. It made life a little more bearable.

[13 : 20] How much more true is that of us? It's what we share that establishes our friendship. It's nice to find someone who likes to swim or something.

But as Christians, friendship really takes off when we find a friend who shares similar struggles, similar longings, and a similar desire to cling to Christ.

That's what Solomon's getting at. The greatest vanity in the world is someone who has no one to share that with. Solomon's very critical of this man.

Life is pointless if you have no friends. But according to Solomon, the only person this man has to blame is himself. He failed to ask the question.

He failed to reach out. He failed to be a friend. Often we focus on, what kind of friend do I want? Right? Solomon pushes us to ask, what kind of friend do others want from me?

[14 : 31] I guarantee you, if you ask the second question, you'll never have trouble. Often the focus is on wanting a good friend, but rarely on being a good friend.

But Solomon is challenging us. Solomon is asking you and me a question. Why don't you have the friends you want? Let's do a little inventory.

Why don't you? Is it because of too much work? Do you have, like this man, a sinful preoccupation with work?

Does your life resemble this man's no end to toil? Do you decide the parameters of your work, or does your work decide the parameters of your life?

Why don't you have the friends you want? I mean, the friends you want is your focus on the ideal friend. Now, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a number of books. He was famously in prison under Hitler in World War II.

[15 : 42] And he wrote a book called Life Together, a fascinating book on community. About a third of it's really weird and doesn't make sense. But the first part and the last part are amazing. And one of the things he says in there is the enemy of community is always the ideal.

The enemy of community is ideal. In our community group this week, we were talking about how we can always be a good Christian on the times we plan for it. You know, like when we plan to get some money out of ATM to give to someone.

Well, community is the same way. Sometimes we get into community and we think, I can be a great friend to people if they meet all my pre-existing conditions. You know, if they meet all my preconditions. If they agree to meet with me on the times that I can meet.

If they agree to do the things that I like to do. If they want to talk about the things that I like to talk about. Then I can be a great friend. I don't see what the big deal is. I'm easy to get along with.

I'm just wanting to be a friend to somebody. The ideal can rob us so quickly. Rather than being a friend to the person right before us.

[16 : 46] We spend our lives longing for the ones that's not before our face. Why don't you have the friends you want? Is it your unwillingness to listen? Now, maybe people don't want to hang out with you because you literally do not shut your mouth.

But I'm thinking about something different. Maybe it's because you can't receive. Because you can't learn.

Because you never really hear people. Whatever it is, Solomon says, most often, you're the one to blame. Now, that's not comfortable news.

Proverbs 18, 1 says, whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire. He breaks out against all sound judgment. See that? Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire.

Isolation is most often not because friends have left you. Isolation is most often because you have left them. Sought your own desire. Loved your own desires more.

[17 : 53] And the end will not be pretty. It's not good for man to be alone. Point two, one friend is better. One friend is better. Solomon has just told us that no friends is the worst.

It's not good for man to be alone. Now he continues, one friend is better. He tells us, he gives us three reasons why two are better than one.

The idea there is you and another. Why one friend is better than none. The first is that friends help. Friends help.

Now these are some of the great verses, you know. These are ones that might be on your graduation card or something like that. But two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, the two together, one will lift up his fellow.

But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up. Now you see again that emphasis on number two are better than one. It's a simple story.

[18 : 58] It's like an elementary story, you know. If one friend falls, the other will lift him up. Well, what's a man to do if he falls and there's no one around?

The idea behind the story is life is a journey. Regardless of how carefully we plan and how hard we try to avoid it, we run into obstacles. We run into unexpected twists and turns that leave us in need of help.

Sometimes it leaves us literally stranded on the side of the road and we stumble into the pit, so to speak. Obviously for us, the pits aren't usually literal, but they're no less real.

Relationships break. Conflicts ensue. Jobs are lost. Financial troubles mount. Tragedy strikes. Sin entangles. We stumble and fall to a place where we cannot pull ourselves up.

Now for self-made men, that's a hard place to be. It reminds me of that commercial, I've fallen and I can't get up. Remember that as a kid? I've fallen and I can't get up.

[20 : 05] But two are better than one. Because someone will be there to lift you up. There's a couple things we must see about this very simple parable.

The first is you have to have a friend before the danger comes in order to find the help you need in danger. You have to have a friend before the danger comes in order to find the help you need in danger.

You know, and so often that's really, that's what community group is, even though we're having a July break. But that's what community group is, is forming the type of friendship that you will need when you need them.

That's what the Christian life is. Most often you go to community group, oh, do I really need to talk about trouble again tonight? You know, maybe not, maybe not. Maybe it's not your turn tonight.

But one day you'll be the one raising your hand saying, I need help. But you've got to have a friend before the danger in order to find help in the danger. The second is when danger comes, a friend steps in to help.

[21 : 03] When danger comes, the friend steps in to help. He lowers his arm. It may be practical help. It may be financial help.

It may be correction. You know, much like my child, if they went in a reach for the stove-eye, I would immediately correct them to rescue them from danger.

And the same thing happens in the community. I love the story about Moses and his weariness. Actually, the beginning of eldership in Jerusalem, or in Judaism, early in the days of the people of Israel, Moses was leading them, was providing all the direction they needed.

He was the judge, so to speak. He made the decision for all the practical and wisdom and legal matters of the people, but he was doing too much.

He was overworking. He wasn't even aware of it yet, but his father-in-law perceived, this is not going to end well, Moses. He says, what you're doing is not good.

[22 : 11] You need to delegate it to other people. He raised up 70 elders to delegate it to him. I'm sure Moses wanted Jethro to encourage him, but Jethro corrected him, and so doing rescued him from falling into the pit.

A true friend doesn't tell you what you want to hear, always. A true friend tells you what you need to hear. You know, I want to pause for just a second. Do you have a friend who's stumbling?

Do you have a friend in danger of falling? Do you have a friend who's straying from the community? We talk about that, you know.

We watch. We try to care for this little community. The idea is not because of the love of this type of community, but the idea is that people will drift from the community of faith before they drift from the faith.

And so when they begin to drift from the community of faith, the community of faith should be alert to pull them back in. Do you have a friend who's drifting?

[23 : 15] Because everyone who drifts from the community of faith ends up drifting from the faith, and if so, you have a friend who needs help. Go to them. Remember the end of James?

Blessed is anyone who restores a brother from wandering. Second, friend's comfort. Friends help, friend's comfort. Again, another simple parable.

Two are better than one. If two friends lie together, they keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Very simple story.

Now, it comes off a little bit odd to us. Why would two people lie together unless they were married? But there's not a hint of romance here, even though I think that's the easiest way to get warm with your wife.

But the idea is imagine traveling through the wilderness. The desert gets cold at night. It's hard to stay warm. If no one's around, you'll freeze to death, perhaps.

[24 : 17] But if someone's with you, you can share the body heat. Perhaps a better picture for us, a couple rugged cowboys pulling over a blanket to share under the cold, dark sky.

With the benefit of having a friend, there's warmth. Friends are like that. They comfort. Again, often not literal.

Sometimes it's counsel we need. Proverbs 27, 9 says, Oil and perfume make the heart glad. Sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel. Middle East culture, oil and perfume in a dry, hot climate with no indoor plumbing were a welcome luxury.

They made the heart glad. They brought a sense of confidence. So too the counsel of a friend. A friend gives you counsel and insight. It makes you refreshed and invigorated.

It relieves your anxieties and makes you a better person. Often that's what you need. The sweetness of a friend comes from the counsel that refreshes you and restores you.

[25 : 24] Often it's not just counsel we need. It's encouragement. First Thessalonians 5, 14 says, We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle. Encourage the faint-hearted. Help the weak.

Be patient with them all. What's encouragement? Another place in the New Testament says, All our words should be used for building up.

I think that gets at what encouragement is. Encouragement is words that build up. Words that strengthen. Words that toughen. Words that put courage into your heart.

I remember years ago, before we had our first kid, we had the first of what would have been, what became, three miscarriages.

And we had just got back from pastor's college, pretty excited about this little baby in the womb. And we'd heard a heartbeat and all that stuff. And we went back for another visit to the OB and didn't hear a heartbeat.

[26 : 32] We had one of those ultrasound tech in there. And she went in and got the doctor. And the doctor looked as well. And then turned to us and said, You know, you've lost your child.

You've lost the pregnancy. And graciously, she gave us a few Kleenex and stuff. And then she said, You can go out this back door and you don't have to see anybody.

And we said, Okay. Went out the back door and beside the elevator, there was a bathroom. And I said, I've got to go in the bathroom. And I threw water on my face.

I said, Lord, how can I lead this girl? My wife is so excited about this baby. What am I going to do? I texted a few friends, actually.

I said, We lost the baby. Would you please pray? And one friend wrote back, I'm so sorry, but God is with you and give you all you need to care for Kim.

[27 : 35] And I don't know what to tell you, but in that moment, it was stunning what about 19 words did to my heart. Suddenly, I washed my face and adjusted my gaze to the woman that God had entrusted to me.

And that's what encouragement does. I think that's why Jesus sent out disciples two by two. So they can encourage one another and protect one another from discouragement. That's the comfort we often need.

Not literal. It's often the encouragement to press on. And I just pray. I mean, this church is so filled with encouragement. Several weeks ago, several outlets, inlets of encouragement.

Suddenly, one particular day is very, very meaningful. And I love the way this encouragement is. And I just pray that it would be a place just filled with encouragement. Because here's the idea.

Anyone can criticize. Anyone can tear down. Anyone can exercise their gift of discernment. But a humble church will encourage and will press us on towards following Christ and give us the comfort that we need.

[28 : 48] And thirdly, friends protect. So this is sub point three. Friends protect. Friends protect. This is another simple story.

Two are better than one. Suppose a man was traveling. Someone came upon him, tried to rob him. If he had a friend there, though a man might prevail against one who's alone, two will withstand him.

So the idea is if they're traveling, someone comes upon him, tries to rob him. If he had a friend there, the two of them would take him out. But if he's alone, he wouldn't prevail.

He wouldn't win. He'd be robbed of everything he had. I mean, such a simple story. But the truth is vital. True friends don't just help you.

True friends don't just say nice things to you. True friends fight for you. True friends don't fight against you. They don't fight about, or they don't talk about you behind your back.

[29 : 50] They don't gossip about you. They don't slander you. They don't tear you down. True friends fight for you. They align themselves with you. They stand up for you. They roll up their sleeves for you.

True friendship means you have to be able to brawl. Because sometimes, to defend the truth and defend a good name requires brawling.

One of my favorite scenes from Corrie ten Boom's book that I quoted about 20 times in the month of, or March and April, is about how friends protect.

In the midst of World War II, Corrie ten Boom and her Christian family hid scores of Jews in their home from Nazi soldiers who invaded Holland and were cruising the town at night searching houses.

Early days of the invasion, they had seven people. It could have rotated, but in general, they had seven people in the home at a time. They constructed a secret room upstairs, a part of the room that they created another room within it where each of those seven people had to hide if a Nazi soldier stopped by.

[31 : 08] Through the advice of several people of the resistance, they installed a big doorbell buzzer, big enough to be heard throughout the whole house. Everyone could hear it.

Day in, day out, they would sound the buzzer and practice scattering to the room. They're all over the house doing whatever it is you would do locked in a house all day long.

But then when they heard the buzzer, they scattered to the secret room at a moment's notice. It was all very serious and very scary. They knew, to some degree, what waited for them if they were taken.

If anything was left behind that didn't fit in the room, the Nazis were sure to search the house. It might be a scarf. It might be a few extra forks at the table.

It might be a bed unmade. It might be a bed that's still warm in the middle of the night because someone was laying in it. If Nazi soldiers found any of those things, they were sure to search the house.

[32 : 19] the first time they ran the test, it took four minutes. They were trying to get it under 70 seconds. The second time, two and a half minutes. Gradually, they were able to shave a few seconds here and a few seconds there.

But then Mary showed up, needing a place to stay. Mary. I quote, Mary, at 76, the oldest of our guests, was the one who posed the greatest problem.

The moment Mary stepped through our door, I heard the asthmatic wheezing, which had made the other host unwilling to take her in. You can't scatter when you can't breathe.

Since her ailment compromised the safety of the others, we took up the problem in caucus, in a meeting. The seven most concerned joined Father, Betsy, and me, that's Corey, in the front room.

There's no pretending, Corey said. Mary has a difficulty, especially after climbing stairs, which is where the secret room was, that could put all of you in danger.

[33 : 32] In the silence that followed, Mary's labored breathing seemed especially loud. Can I speak? Ussi said.

Of course. It seems to me that we're all here in your house because of some difficulty or another. We're the orphan children, the ones no one else wanted.

Any one of us is jeopardizing all the others. I vote that Mary stay. Good, said lawyer Hink. Let's put it to a vote.

Hands began raising, but Mary was struggling to speak. Secret ballots she brought out at last. No one should be ashamed.

Hink brought out a sheet of paper from the desk in the next room and tore it into nine small strips. You too, he said, handing ballots to Betsy, father, and me. If we're discovered, you suffer the same as us.

[34 : 34] He handed out pencils and said, Mark, no, if it's too great a risk. Yes, if you think she belongs here. For a moment, pencils scratched, then Hink collected the folded ballots.

He opened them in silence, then reached over and dropped them in Mary's lap. Nine little scraps of paper, nine times the word, yes.

that's a friend. Someone who stands up for you when it might cost you, cost them their life.

Two are better than one. One friend is better than another. It turns out the buddy system was not just for elementary school field trips.

It's for life. It's for real life under the sun. Vital. Three, many friends are not best. Many friends are not best.

[35 : 43] No friends is worse. One friend is better. Many friends are not best. Solomon concludes chapter four with a story about a poor but wise man and an old but foolish king.

The story is a story of a rags to riches success. It's this poor man who through his wisdom climbs up in the world. Unlike the king who's born in riches and abundance, the youth is poor.

He grows up in poverty but he becomes wise and he becomes well known for his wisdom. He climbs the ladder. He gains such a following that he stands in the king's place.

Look in verse 15. I saw all the living and move about the sun along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. He says, there was no end of all the people all of whom he led.

There was no end to them. There was no limit. Everyone loved him. Everyone supported him. Everyone followed him. But he continues in verse 16, yet those who come later will not rejoice in him.

[36 : 53] So Solomon begins by saying, better is a poor but wise man than a foolish but rich king. But in the end, he says, when people no longer love wisdom, the poor wise youth is no better off than the rich foolish king.

Does that make sense? That's what he's saying. Because people, when they stop loving wisdom, which this world is famous for not loving wisdom, then actually the poor, I mean, the rich foolish king is just a saint as the poor, wise man.

No wonder Solomon says, all this is vanity and is striving after wind. And so, you might be asking, what's this got to do with friendship? At first glance, nothing.

But upon closer look, I think there's an important tie. If two is better than one, then we might begin to think that three is better than two.

Or even that four is better than three. Five is better than four. Six than five. And on, and on, and on. But verses 13 through 16 are warning us that more is not always better.

[38 : 10] Similar to the book of Proverbs, the story here and Solomon are drawing a line between companions and friends. Proverbs 18, 24 says, a man of many companions may come to ruin, but there's a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

The actual word for companion and friend are the same in the verse, but the meaning is different in context. A companion is just a run-of-the-mill friend. A person you wave to at the restaurant or chat with at the checkout line.

Not a bad person, just not a friend. Just an acquaintance, just a companion. The other is a friend, a person who's more than a companion, someone who's close.

They're a true friend, but I don't say true friend because in the book of Proverbs, if they're a friend, it's assumed they're a true friend. Proverbs teaches the difference between a companion and a friend comes out in trouble.

There are people who take two steps back when trouble strikes. Those are companions. There are people who take a step forward when trouble strikes. Those are friends.

[39 : 13] Now, the nub of the matter is there's danger in having many companions. There's a danger being well-known, being popular, being well-liked. People that know your name slap you on the back.

Say good job. There's a danger. Not necessarily because they call you friend. The danger is you might begin to believe there's something more than companions. You might begin to believe they're friends.

Danger's been around since the beginning, but perhaps more than any time in history, most of the people in our lives are companions, few are friends, and we see it.

Last month, I read a fascinating article about the Princeton professor, Joshua Katz. I don't know all this guy's view of the world.

I have a strong sense we disagree on quite a few things, but the story was fascinating. By all accounts, Mr. Katz was one of the most well-loved professors at Princeton.

[40 : 17] So this is just last year. He was an excellent teacher, winning Princeton's highest teaching award early in his career. But it wasn't just his teaching that made him well-loved.

It was the fact that he genuinely cared for other faculty and students. One student tells how he helped her gain citizenship, studied with her, helped her through the paperwork.

Another student shares how he counseled her through an unplanned pregnancy. Two students are alive because he talked them out of suicide. Mr. Katz, the article said, walk the walk.

He was a true professor. But then, in July 2020, things took a turn. I'm quoting now, when hundreds of his colleagues in July 2020 signed a letter with demands in the name of anti-racism, he penned a response in the school newspaper.

He agreed with some of their demands but found others to be deeply immoral and discriminatory, including extra pay and perks for faculty of color and the formation of a committee to investigate and discipline so-called racist scholarship.

[41 : 23] It was admittedly a controversial article. He knew that, but the response was shocking. One of his beloved students publicly rebuked him for his, quote, flagrant racism.

The head of his department in the classics, a person with whom he had regularly ate lunch, condemned him in an email to the entire department. After that, every time he saw Mr. Katz on campus, he looked the other way.

Then, his best friend at Princeton, a friend who spent many days in his home with his family, said nothing to him for weeks. Eventually, she said a few words about her disappointment and never spoke to him again.

This is the kicker. Miss Katz's wife commented, I watched the man I love become a shell of his former self as he realized that many of his closest friends were not friends at all.

For well over a year, Mr. Katz lived in the dread of losing his job. Eventually, last summer, he did. I watched the man I love become a shell of his former self as he realized that many of his closest friends were not friends at all.

[42 : 39] Solomon's putting up caution tape. Watch out. Many friends is not best.

Find a few friends, devote yourself to being a good, godly friend to them. So how many friends you need? The emphasis of the text is one, you, and one friend.

Does that mean you cannot have more than one friend? Of course not. But it does mean you cannot have many more. The Puritans used to ask God for one bosom friend, one person with whom they could pull close and cry out to the Lord with, one to share their troubles with and share everything about and pray about everything with.

You know, I cannot help but wonder if the emphasis on one friend is meant to point us to someone else as well. The truth of the matter is there's only one friend who will remain with us to the end.

There's only one friend who will never be taken from us. There's only one friend who will never fail. He's the friend who fell in the pit. He's the friend that no one reached down to pull him up.

[44 : 11] He's the friend who was left all alone with no one to comfort him, no one to help him, no one to relieve his pain. He was the friend who was overtaken by a bunch of thugs, betrayed by one of his closest friends.

He was the poor, wise youth who rose up through the ranks. He was from Nazareth. What good comes out of Nazareth? He was a nothing but seemed to gain everything. Everyone loved him.

Everyone praised him but the tide turned. One week they greeted him saying, Hosanna to the son of David. The next week they condemned him shouting, crucify him. crucify him.

I think Solomon, even in ways that he doesn't understand is pointing us forward to Jesus. That is the almighty friend of sinners and it's there that he stood up for you in your greatest danger.

Enduring the wrath of God deserved for your sins. It's there and from there that he speaks a better comforting word than any other person could. A word that's better than the blood of Abel.

[45 : 13] A word that your sins are atoned. When you are forgiven, rise and walk. And he promises he'll never leave you to fight for you to stand with you. Promises not one hair will fall from your head apart from his command.

What a friend we have in Jesus Christ. Let us pray. Father in heaven, we hide in you this day and we thank you. Oh Lord, help us as we seek to navigate this area of our lives and seek to glorify you.

May we rest more and more in the friend we have in Jesus Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

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