

LIVING ON THE RAGGED EDGE: COMING TO TERMS WITH REALITY

ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS SURVIVAL

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12



The Heart of the Matter

Loneliness has been called the most desolate word in the English language. But it's more than a word. To many, it is a fact of life, especially for those who make it to the top (as we saw in the previous message) and begin to live distant and unaccountable lives. As Solomon finished describing that grim scene, he felt the need to offer a better plan, which led him into the thoughts we're considering today. If we take his counsel to heart, we'll discover one of the most important truths in all Scripture: two really are better than one. And upon discovering and applying Solomon's words, we learn how to survive these lonely, desolate days between here and eternity.



Discovering the Way

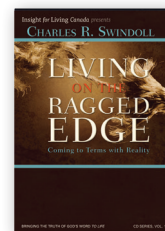
1. Common Cries of the Lonely

If we were to stop and listen to the lonely people around us or search our own hearts for that desperate cry of dereliction, we might hear something like the following:

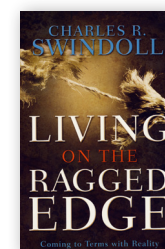
- “*Why don't people love me and help me out of this?*” This cry flows from a heart bent on blaming others. In order to have companionship in times of need, we must have cultivated friendships before a crisis begins. Difficulties don't attract friends, but friends remain true through difficulties.
- “*If only others realized how difficult I have it.*” This is the lament of self-pity. Few responses will ruin a relationship more quickly than this one. In fact, it's an attention-getter that quickly wears out another person's patience.
- “*Nobody really cares. I'm all alone in this.*” These words reflect a martyrmentality. Of course, if nobody knows about another's heartache, they certainly can't be blamed for not responding in a helpful manner..



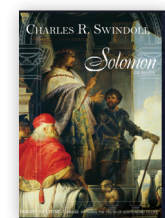
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2. Survival Counsel for the Lonely (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12)

Bemoaning the fact that we're lonely won't help us. Instead, we need to recognize that companionship is the solution to our feelings of alienation, isolation, and abandonment. Although God is the ultimate fulfillment of our desire for companionship, He has chosen to meet that need through others. God intentionally created people both to need others and to meet others' needs.



GETTING TO THE ROOT

Two Are Better Than One

In Ecclesiastes 4:9, the phrase translated “good return for their labor” may also be translated “a good outcome from their trouble.” The word *amal* (“labor”) often means “trouble” in the Old Testament, as in Genesis 41:51; Job 5:6–7; and Jeremiah 20:18.¹ In each case, when two people toil together, they can share the burden and accomplish more.

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Starting Your Journey

Here are some biblical examples that prove Solomon's words true:

- Elijah and Elisha: Companions calm the troubled waters of our souls.
- Naomi and Ruth: Companions build bridges of hope and reassurance when we feel exposed and self-conscious.
- David and Jonathan: Companions take our part when others take us apart.

Do you have any true companions? If so, how have they supported and encouraged you? If not, will you begin cultivating one abiding friendship today?

ENDNOTE

1. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 765.