

# Ecclesiastes 4:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

## Analysis

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The crescendo of the companionship passage: if two are better than one, 'a threefold cord is not quickly broken.' The Hebrew 'chut ha-meshulahs' (threefold cord) creates a powerful image of exponential strength through unity. While one strand breaks easily and two provide some resistance, three twisted together create disproportionate strength. The phrase 'not quickly broken' (Hebrew 'lo bimherah yinateq') suggests enduring resilience under stress. Christian tradition often interprets this as God being the third strand in marriage or friendship, though the text doesn't explicitly state this. The principle applies broadly: marriages, ministries, and communities strengthened by multiple committed relationships display supernatural resilience against adversity, temptation, and opposition.

## Historical Context

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Ancient rope-making twisted multiple fibers/strands to create strength—a common sight in agricultural and maritime contexts. The principle appears in military contexts: three soldiers can defend against attackers more effectively than their numbers suggest (defensive formation, relieving fatigue). Jewish tradition applied this to Torah study in groups of three. Early Christians met persecution as communities, not isolated believers—their corporate witness proved resilient. The medieval church emphasized trinitarian theology—God Himself is community (Father, Son, Spirit)—making human community reflect divine nature. Modern

counseling recognizes that isolated individuals face greater risk of defeat by addiction, depression, and spiritual attack than those in accountable communities.

## Related Passages

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**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

## Study Questions

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1. What 'threefold cords' in your life provide resilient strength—and are these relationships being neglected or cultivated?
2. How might inviting God as the 'third strand' in your human relationships transform their purpose and strength?

## Interlinear Text

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אָמַן	וְתַלְפִּי	בַּאֲפָתָה	בְּשֶׁנָּוּם	יַעֲמֹד	וְתַלְפִּי	וְתַלְפִּי	אֶבְחָרִים
H518	H8630	H259	H8147	H5975	H5048	H2339	
prevail	And if one	against him two	shall withstand				cord

בְּמִשְׁלֵשׁ	לֹא	בְּמִתְחָבֵב	בְּמִתְחָבֵב
him and a threefold	H3808	is not quickly	broken
H8027		H4120	H5423

## Additional Cross-References

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**Ephesians 4:3** (Parallel theme): Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.