

Ecclesiastes 4:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

Analysis

This verse begins Ecclesiastes' profound meditation on companionship and community. The simple declaration 'Two are better than one' counters radical individualism with relational wisdom. The Hebrew 'tovim' (better/good) indicates not merely pragmatic advantage but qualitative goodness. The rationale—'they have a good reward for their labour' (Hebrew 'sakar tov,' good wages/return)—shows that collaborative effort produces superior results. This principle operates physically (shared labor), emotionally (mutual encouragement), and spiritually (corporate worship, accountability). The verse challenges both self-sufficiency idolatry and codependency, instead promoting interdependent relationships that honor God's design for human community.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern culture was communal, not individualistic. Israelite society organized around families, clans, and tribes, with isolated individuals extremely vulnerable. The wilderness journey required tribal cooperation; farming often involved shared labor. Proverbs repeatedly warns against isolation and commends wise companionship (Proverbs 18:1, 27:17). Jesus sent disciples in pairs (Mark 6:7), Paul had ministry partners (Barnabas, Silas, Timothy), and the early church practiced radical community (Acts 2:44-45). Monastic movements emphasized community over hermitage. Modern Western hyper-individualism makes this wisdom particularly countercultural and necessary.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. In what areas of life are you trying to operate independently when you need collaborative partnership?
2. What 'good reward' have you experienced from working together with others that you couldn't achieve alone?

Interlinear Text

שָׁבַר	לִבָּם	בְּעִמְּלָמָם:	בְּעִמְּלָמָם:	וְבָ	אֲשֶׁר	בַּאֲפָدָה	מִן	בְּשִׁנְיָהִים	וְבָ	אָשֶׁר	בַּאֲפָדָה	מִן	בְּשִׁנְיָהִים	וְבָ		
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H2896 H8147

בְּעִמְּלָמָם:

a good for their labour

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Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 27:17 (Parallel theme): Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

Genesis 2:18 (Good): And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

Mark 6:7 (Parallel theme): And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits;

Numbers 11:14 (Parallel theme): I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.

John 4:36 (Parallel theme): And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.

Acts 13:2 (Parallel theme): As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

Ruth 2:12 (Parallel theme): The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

Haggai 1:14 (Parallel theme): And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God,

2 John 1:8 (Parallel theme): Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.