

# Marks

# of Discipleship

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading  
Giving Time, Talents & Resources ■ Spiritual  
Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond the Church

July 23, 2023

## Day 1: Ecclesiastes 3:12

***I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live;***

In our country we place a high value on personal freedom and the pursuit of happiness. There are a lot of opinions on just how we find happiness and just what personal freedom means. All of creation and our very existence as people is a gift from God. A gift is meant to be opened and used. The ability to be happy and to experience freedom both come from our willingness to accept the responsibility to be producers. God told us in Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply. Our consumption is experienced as happiness because we know that we produce. Our freedom is felt because we accept responsibility to act in a way that gives life.

**Question:** What is the difference between happiness and joy?

**Challenge:** Set a goal for yourself this week to produce more than you consume (food excepted unless you are a farmer)

**Scripture:** Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

## Day 2: Ecclesiastes 3:13

***moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.***

Work is not a burden to bear but a thing to enjoy. When we work we build something - we produce. Taking pleasure in our toil means that we see the growth taking place and know that our work enabled that growth. Eating and drinking is done in community and is more than putting food in our bodies. It is taking the time to interact with others over a meal.

**Question:** Do you enjoy your work? Why or why not?

**Challenge:** Think about your meals this week and see what your opinion of eating really is.

**Scripture:** Nehemiah 8:7-17

## Day 3: Ecclesiastes 4:9

***Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.***

For parents, the phrase coming from a 2 or 3 year old, "I can do it myself" can cause concern. On the one hand we want the child to do things themselves but on the other hand some of the things they want to do they ought not to do. One of the challenges of raising children is to guide them to know the times they need help and the times they need to do it themselves. Though we too often praise the *one* who does great feats (going around the world by themselves in a boat) the truth is that *partnerships* are what bring about the most fruit and produces the best results.

**Question:** Do you agree with this verse?

**Challenge:** Give some examples of how this verse is correct and in what cases this verse might be wrong.

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:11-21

## Day 4: Ecclesiastes 4:10

***For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.***

There is an old joke about the Lone Ranger. and Tonto they are surrounded by angry Indians bent on killing them. The Lone Ranger turns to Tonto and says, "Well it looks like the end for us." Tonto says, "what do you mean - us?" One aspect of partnerships mentioned here is the one of being alone. The verse is not just talking about falling down and breaking something or going swimming alone and having trouble but also when our actions have driven another away. Being alone might be the worst feeling a person can have. If we have a partner then the other can pick us up and we can do the same for them.

**Question:** What would make a person a good partner?

**Challenge:** Have you ever fallen and were alone? What did you do and what did it feel like?

**Scripture:** Genesis 2:13-23

## Day 5: Ecclesiastes 4:11

***Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone?***

The writer is coming at partnership from a different angle. He does mean sharing body warmth in a cold place is better than relying on blankets but warmth comes from knowing that someone is sharing your hopes and dreams. In Monastic communities the monks (or nuns) do not share body warmth but they feel the warmth of their brothers and sisters around them. They might be in separate rooms but still feel the warmth of being together.

**Question:** Does knowing someone supports you keep you "warm?"

**Challenge:** When has God felt warm to you?

**Scripture:** Genesis 6:14-7:5

## Day 6: Ecclesiastes 4:12

***And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.***

Jesus said (Matthew 18:20), "Where two or three are gathered together there am I in the midst of them." When two come together in Christ's name nothing will be able to prevail against them. As famous as Paul is for beginning new churches he was never alone in his work. We need to be together in Jesus' name, not our own. Even if it looks like the forces of evil have prevailed, still if two work in Christ's name they (we, the church) will prevail.

**Question:** How do you gather in Jesus' name? Is it a special prayer or attitude or a reading of scripture or what?

**Challenge:** Think of a modern example of where evil looked to be winning but in the long run lost.

**Scripture:** John 15:1-17