

“Don’t Settle for Uber Friends

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Series: New Year, New You, Part 3: Living For Others, Week 1: Commitment

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Uber is everywhere. For those of you who don’t know Uber and Lyft are ride shares. Ordinary drivers, like you and me, agree to pick up passengers and take them for a ride. You just click on the handy phone app and a driver arrives in minutes. At the end you pay the fare on your phone. Most drivers are on time and safe. Yet it can be a gamble. You never know who’ll pick you up. When we jumped in the backseat of one Uber car and took off, the driver complained the other drivers didn’t know what they were doing. He said this while turning down a street labeled, “Wrong Way Do Not Enter.” He continued his tirade against police officers for pulling him over...while driving 30 miles over the speed limit. When the EZ Pass lane flashed a warning sign, he groused about faulty technology they need to fix. I was so frightened, by the time we arrived at the airport I wanted to kiss the curb. That’s when he confessed he also used to be a LYFT driver. “What happened?” we asked. “For some reason a lot of mean passengers gave me bad reviews.” “The nerve of those people,” I replied. “What do you do for living?” he asked. “I’m a pastor.” “Pastor will you pray for me?” “Friend, I’ve already been praying for you. In fact, I bet you get more people to pray than I do.”

Uber keeps growing. Now, in addition to Uber rides, you can have dinner, groceries and packages delivered by Uber. What’s next? Uber dog-walking? Uber lawn and laundry? Uber exercise – let someone else exercise for you? Uber prayer?

Here’s the latest: Uber Friends. A Japanese business called "Family Romance" maintains a list of actors who are just a click away. They will pretend to be any role you want from your baby to your date, your spouse, your grandparent. The founder of the company has played a dad to children who don't know he's an actor. He's been a groom in fake weddings the guests did not know were staged. He even provided a baby for a still pregnant woman who desperately wanted her dying dad to meet his "grandchild."

One article claims Uber Friends could catch on in America because of “our longing for control combined with a vast laziness—two sentiments alive and well in our current culture.” Describing why women choose to hire him as a boyfriend, the owner of Family Romance says:

The women typically say that in a real relationship it takes years to create a strong connection. For them, it's a lot of hassle and disappointment. It's just easier to schedule two hours per week to interact with an ideal boyfriend. There's no conflict, no jealousy, no bad habits. Everything is perfect.¹

Everything is perfect? Perfectly empty. What’s wrong with Uber Friends? They lack the one thing which makes a relationship real: Commitment.

¹ Katrina Trinko, "Will Renting Friends Be As Popular As Calling Uber?" Acculturated blog (11-17-17)

Real relationships start with Commitment. Real relationships stay together with Commitment. Think about the relationships in your life – all of them. Picture in your mind your friends, coworkers, teammates, fellow students, siblings, parents, children, spouse, neighbors, fellow church members. What causes one relationship to be close and another distant? Deep or shallow? There are many factors but one which underlies them all is Commitment. Webster’s Dictionary says Commitment comes from a Latin word meaning “to connect” and “to entrust.” Commitment does require a connection and trust between at least two people. Now the word can also mean to have someone committed to jail which is how some describe their relationships. But in its best light, Commitment involves keeping a promise – not just once but day in and day out, year in and year out. That’s why the wedding vows ask a couple to love each other as husband and wife:

In good times and bad, in sickness and health, whether we be rich or poor, whether we succeed or fail, as long as we both shall live.

I tell couples these vows are not just a pretty Hallmark card. The commitment they are about to make is unconditional. It is intended to last regardless of the circumstances.

During the season of Lent we will strengthen the third pillar of our New Year, New You Series – the Relational Pillar. So far we’ve learned to Live Fit and Live Fearless. For the next six weeks we’ll discover how to Live For Others, how to have healthier relationships. I’ve never known a couple who entered marriage planning to get out of it. And I’ve never met anyone after a break up who said divorce is “the easy way out.” Yet every relationship can be broken by what I call “Commitment Killers.” Wise old King Solomon writes in the book of Ecclesiastes about the poisonous power of Commitment Killers. He should know. He speaks from personal experience. Ecclesiastes is a sober look at the danger of four Commitment Killers.

1. **Wandering** Solomon tries out every type of pleasure. He says,

I thought in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. Ecclesiastes 2:1,10.

Commitment is threatened when someone wanders in search of pleasure. Some new thrill, some new experience, something new on the Internet, some new person will satisfy more than the relationship you are in.

2. **Working.** Next Solomon throws himself into his work.

My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. Ecclesiastes 2:10-11.

Work is one of God's good gifts. But it can become our god. It gets out of balance and crowds out the rest of our relationships. If you are on a mission to build a business, close a deal, discover a scientific breakthrough, climb a ladder, there is always a cost to pay when work gets out of control and usually it's paid by the people in your life.

3. **Wealth.** Solomon next searches for meaning in money and possessions.

Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? Ecclesiastes 5:10-11.

Someone asked multimillionaire John D. Rockefeller, "How do you know if you have enough money?" He replied, "When you get just a little bit more." We've been trained to want the latest Iphone, Ipad, I, I, I – it just feeds our selfishness and hurts our relationships. What's one of greatest causes of marriage difficulties? Money problems. What can break up a family? Fights over who gets the possessions in the will.

4. **Wisdom.** This is the most subtle Commitment Killer of all. Wise Solomon says,

Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom. I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. But I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both. Then I thought in my heart, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?" I said in my heart, "This too is meaningless" Ecclesiastes 2:12-15.

As good as wisdom can be, it hurts a relationship when one person thinks he's wiser than the other, one person thinks she's superior to the other and both people think they know what the other should do to fix the problem. I even see some relationships break down when two people over analyze a problem but never do what needs to be done to heal it.

So those are the four Commitment Killers: Wandering, Working, Wealth and Wisdom. I chose four W's because each one weakens the Commitment necessary to hold a relationship together. And that works in two directions: they get in the way of our relationship with Jesus and with the people in our lives. So how do you keep Commitment strong? Solomon gives us four Commitment Keepers.

First, a Commitment requires two people to be **Partners** – to work together. Solomon says,

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work Ecclesiastes 4:9.

Frequently one person in the relationship complains he or she is doing most or all of the work. Sometimes this is true. The baby needed a diaper change. The new Dad said to his wife, "Why don't you change this one and I'll get the next one." When it was time for another diaper change, Mom presented the baby to Dad who was sitting on the couch

watching a game. “It’s time to change the next one,” she said. Dad looked up and replied, “Oh, I meant the next baby.”

Whether it’s housework, yardwork, school projects, a work presentation or church mission it’s essential for everyone to do their part as partners. We have different roles, different abilities, different responsibilities. Yet if one person in a relationship refuses to do his or her part there is an imbalance. The other person is turned from partner to parent and that causes resentment. If you don’t want bossing, nagging or complaining from the outside, try motivating yourself from the inside. This week, do an additional task you aren’t required to do. Love is expressed in the little acts done each day. Be a partner.

The second Commitment Keeper is **Pardon**. Forgiveness is essential for committed relationship. Solomon says,

If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Ecclesiastes 4:10

Sooner or later someone is going to make a mistake, slip up or even fall. It can be a minor error or a heart-wrenching sin. When one falls, you can leave them in the ditch and walk on by. You can bury them under a pile of accusations and attacks. Or you can reach out a hand and, with forgiveness, lift them up. Now they may have done something really wrong which they need to fix. And you might not be able to forgive them right away. But an offer of help and eventual forgiveness can bring healing and a more hopeful future.

Many know Ulysses Grant as the General who led the Union army to victory in the Civil War and became 18th President of the United States. A grateful nation placed a large statue of Grant at the foot of the U.S. Capitol. Yet there is another statue which is not as well-known and has been moved eight times. Major General John Rawlins was Grant’s closest friend and chief of staff from the days when Grant was a humble store clerk, through every battle of the war, right up to his time in the White House.

Knowing that Grant was an alcoholic, Rawlins extracted a pledge from Grant to abstain from liquor. He stayed by his side, kept him on track and helped him stand again after a slip. In many ways, it was Rawlins who made it possible for Grant to save the Union and end slavery. Without his love and support, without his helping hand, Grant would hardly be able to climb into the saddle. To whom do you need to offer a helping hand and forgiveness? Who needs your pardon?

The third Commitment Keeper is **Proximity**. Solomon states:

Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Ecclesiastes 4:11.

It can be bitter to face some of life’s cold blasts of sorrow, worry or depression alone. The only way to make a burden worse is by trying to bear it alone. We need the warmth of other believers in close proximity when we are chilled to the soul. But to receive that warmth and comfort you must open up and welcome it. The typical U.S. married couple

spends four minutes a day in "meaningful conversation" with each other. That's 0.3 percent of the hours in a day.²

On the back side of your handout are suggestions for letting go of items which distract, distance and even divide relationships. This Lent, let go of something which demands your attention and focus that time on building your relationship.

The recent heavy snowfall caused every tree to be dazzling and frosted with crystalline icing. When the snow fell on the pine trees along our back parking lot, the branches, though bending low under the weight, did not snap because they were supported by other trees. But on the other side of the fence, large branches which stuck out alone with no support snapped off under the heavy burden. God never meant you to walk the chilling, biting, bitter storms of this life alone. Get in a growth group. It's so essential to have others close by to lift you up when the burdens are too great to bear.

The Fourth Commitment Keeper is **Protection**. Solomon says,

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. Ecclesiastes 4:12.

In ancient warfare, soldiers stood shield to shield in a tight formation as they advanced. In close combat, they fought not just for country or cause. Each battled to keep the comrades on either side alive. There are a lot of influences, intruders and infections from the outside which try to pull your relationships apart. There are temptations, tests and trials from the outside which try to tear your relationships apart. There are attacks, assaults and arguments from the outside which try to split your relationships apart. Don't let them. Fight for the one you love. Defend them. Protect them. Shield your relationship from whatever tries to drive a wedge between the two of you. That's what love is.

Someone asked legendary football coach Vince Lombardi what it takes to make a winning team. Lombardi replied:

There are a lot of coaches with good ball clubs who know the fundamentals and have plenty of discipline but still don't win the game. Then you come to the third ingredient: if you're going to play together as a team, you've got to care for one another. You've got to love each other. Each player has to be thinking about the next guy and saying to himself: 'If I don't block that man, Paul is going to get his legs broken. I have to do my job well in order that he can do his. The difference between mediocrity and greatness is the feeling these guys have for each other.'³

That's what Jesus meant when He said,

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends John 15:12-13.

² New Man (Jan/Feb 1995).

³ Leadership, Vol. 15, no. 3.

Who needs your protection? Who can fight for you?

Right about now you might be saying, “It’s impossible for me to keep this kind of commitment.” And you are right. But the Good News is you are not alone. Solomon ends his advice with a cryptic quote:

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:12

What does he mean? Recently I set up a new rope ladder for my grandsons on our backyard fort. Unfortunately, they left off the bottom rungs making the first step too high for Ben and Isaac. I tried to add additional rope rungs but the knots I tied around rope just slipped down. Finally, I discovered the solution is to weave the rope through the other strands. That’s the recipe for strength. Let Jesus be the third strand in your relationship. Let Him be tightly and intimately woven into the fabric of your commitment. Draw true wisdom, true work and true wealth from Him and you won’t ever have to wander. Don’t deny yourselves the power and peace Jesus wants to give you. Let Him show you what true Commitment means.

Terry Muck tells the story of a man who was not the least bit interested in spiritual matters. He did not go to church. He didn’t believe in God. He did, however, enjoy the company of his Christian neighbor. They talked over the back fence frequently, borrowed one another’s lawn mowers and tools. Then the man who did not believe lost his wife in the space of three months. His world fell apart. Afterward he wrote:

I was in total despair. I went through the funeral preparations and the service like I was in a trance. After the service I went to the path along the river and walked all night. But I didn't walk alone. My neighbor—afraid for me, I guess—stayed with me all night. He didn't speak; he didn't even walk beside me. He just followed me. When the sun finally came up over the river, he came over and said, "Let's go get some breakfast."

I go to church now. My neighbor's church. A religion that can produce the kind of caring and love my neighbor showed me is something I want to find out more about. I want to love and be loved like that for the rest of my life.⁴

In that long dark night there were not just two walking the lonely river path. There were three - three friends formed one solid rope that cannot be broken.

You won’t find that on your Uber app.

⁴ Terry Muck, in the March 29 entry of Men of Integrity (March/April 2009).