

# THE PROBLEM OF LONELINESS

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## Introduction:

Loneliness has been called the "disease of the decade", perhaps of every decade in our middle and late twentieth Century.

An early sociological study of loneliness in the book *"The Lonely Crowd"* which came out in 1950 was written these words *"They are crammed and jammed in buses"* a modern poet wrote *"but each of them's alone."*

Then 1/4 of people questioned in one survey said they felt very lonely or cut off from other people at some time during the preceding few weeks. In another study 27% of unmarried women, 10% of married women expressed INTENSE LONELINESS.

Almost 50% of the widows over 50 living in one large Metro area said loneliness was their worst problem. *"Loneliest of all are men, who live alone and are infirm"* said Craig Ellison in *"Roots of Loneliness."*

## I. WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO LONELINESS ?

1. **Social isolation**- With no one around, few friends, and few who seemingly care. Few who know of the lonely person inside. Isolation from others *"like the air we breathe, we take human companionship for granted, until we are deprived of it; Loneliness, and isolation from others, takes a tremendous toll in people's lives."*
2. **A sudden loss of anything**, but especially love or a feeling that no one really loves me or cares.
3. **Pain and heartache in the midst of trials.** Feeling no one understands or cares. Testings that God allows, Cf Job, David, etc.

## II. HOW IS LONELINESS FELT?

1. **What is loneliness??**
  - a. Some describe it in physical terms-- like an empty feeling in the pit of one's stomach, almost to the point of nausea.
  - b. Others describe it as an underlying anxiety, "A big black pit."
  - c. Some say loneliness is a sharp ache in moments of grief, or separation.
  - d. For others it is a long period of stress that wears them down until they are discouraged and defeated. For it is a kind of isolation from others, taking a tremendous toll in the life.
2. **The social isolation, or chronic loneliness** contributes significantly to illness and even to premature death.

Katherine Barrett in the magazine, Ladies Home Journal in 1983 wrote the following: *"In a society where most people live in impersonal cities or suburbs, where electronic entertainment often replaces one-to-one conversation, where people move from job to job, state to state and marriage to marriage, loneliness has become an epidemic."*

### **III. THERE IS A GREAT ANGUISH IN LONELINESS:**

1. It is seen in the letters that come from **prisoners** behind bars.
2. It is heard in the **voices** that comes from the women or the man who shares about the spouse, the **mate leaving them**.
3. It is seen in the face of the spouse who has just **buried** their mate.
4. It can be noted in the grandparents, and, or parents at the funeral of a love **child who was snatched** from their presence in just a few hours by a violent disease.
5. It is observed in the faces of the **single people** who are trying to find community and fellowship in a religious and social world that is family-oriented and couple-centered.
6. It is often seen in the **youth** who is moving through the transition from children to adulthood in that unexplainable time when everything is changing. They often feel their parents don't understand and they are all alone to experience this strangeness. To them no one seems to care.
7. I think that it is often seen in the **faces of wives and also husbands**, who feel totally alone because they are isolated from their mates -- no communication or the hurtful, unkind type of communication. They know the long days of hot wars and cold wars, the sorrows that marriage is not what they thought it would be. Then they experience the pressures that come from illness of children or teens, and a host of other things that compound that loneliness.
8. In some cases wives are all day alone and when the husband comes home it is compounded because there is no affinity between them. And they both feel very lost, very alone -- in physical proximity and no loving closeness.
9. Often it is heard in the music of these decades --- *"Without you," "I'm so Lonely I Could Die," "Ballard of a Lonely Man," "All the Lonely People-- Where Do They All Come From?"*

*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner -- some of us learned in school*

*Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
Alone on a wide, wide sea?  
And never a saint took pity on  
My soul, in agony.*

*Maybe many could say --- Psa 142:4 "No one cares for my soul."*

In His book, "The Devil's Advocate" Morris West writes...*"Let me tell you something important. It is no new thing to be lonely. It comes to all of us sooner or later. Friends die, family dies, lovers and husbands, too. We get old, we get sick. The last and greatest loneliness is death. There are no pills to cure that. There are no formulas to make it go away. Is a human condition we cannot escape, and if we try to run from it we are driven to a darker hell than the one we experienced in the midst of it. But if we face it we remember that there are a million others like us and if we reach out to comfort them and not ourselves, we discover in the end that we are lonely no longer, for we are in a new family... the family of man."* -- While this was written by a worldlying it does speak to us.

We who are saved are not just in the family of mankind but we are in the family of God. What a blessing, what a reassurance that God wants to meet us in our loneliness and we find that, with HIS help, we can overcome it.

#### **IV. COMMENTS, ILLUSTRATIONS FROM HUMAN EXPERIENCES ABOUT LONELINESS:**

*"I was born again as a result of being divorced so I praise the Lord for my divorce, I try to be a blessing, but I am so lonely. Sometimes you get tired of giving, of hurting and you just want to talk and fit in. As for fitting in, forget it. No one understands, because they are couple-oriented. How could they? Help!"*

*"I'm so confused in my thoughts and hurting on the inside so bad I think I'll burst. I'm a thirty-seven-year old woman whose husband left her with four children."*

*"I've prayed and I'm trying so hard to put my problems in God's hands and leave them alone, but it's so hard. I know I'm full of bitterness and resentment. But I am so alone, so lonely. I don't have anyone to talk to or any place to go for help."*

*"A mother wrote... "I am so tired from trying to keep going. Sometimes I feel that I could get sick and die, then God would have to take of these kids and I wouldn't have to worry anymore. I realize I need counseling, but I can't afford it. I cry every night and pray myself to sleep. I have always tried to be a good person and cannot understand why this is happening. I'm trying to keep my faith like Job in the Bible, but I just don't know how much more I can take."*

*"Oh, Father, I just need a reason to go on. It's getting dark, Father, I'm afraid. This reminds me of another dark place I knew; I was three years stumbling through it.*

*Not again, Father, Please! I hurt; inside I am screaming. I do not want this. One by one You have taken away the people I depended on. Now only YOU are left. I do not want to trust you-- YOU WHO have taken away all that mattered. But I am too tired to fight YOU anymore.*

*Would YOU hold my hand, please, Lord? It's getting darker. Too dark now to see more that a step ahead. And colder too. You know, You don't talk to me like people do. I guess that's what I miss. And people are tangible. I can feel them there.*

*It's black now, Father. I looks to me like it will never be bright again. Not here. But when we get to YOUR place, that's bright again, isn't it? It's hard to accept this blackness for that long. But I guess You're not asking me to. Only to accept it for now, this present minute. It's just that these minutes run together "til I can hardly remember a time before them...."*

## V. LONELY SINGLES:

One of great phenomena of our day is the "singles explosion" in our country. I do not have any real recent figures but listen-- between 1970 and 1982 their ranks swelled from 10.9 million to 19.4 million. 78% increase. Among the ranks of those living alone grew between 1970 - 1981 from 2.8 M to 6 M. between 1950 - 1982 -- an increase of 385% of those who live alone.

A staggering one in four and in some cases three American children are raised by a single parent. In urban areas that number is one in four. All singles-- widowed, etc., include over 50 M in the U.S.

The need of satisfying relationships on the part of single people has caused all kinds of new enterprises to grow up -- singles bars -- encounter and support groups -- computerized dating -- a Christians newspaper carried an ad-- "*God did not ordain loneliness*" and the ad urged singles to subscribe to a monthly publication through which they could meet other singles on four continents.

One older woman put it this way: *"I sit in the pew next to a warm body every week, but I feel no heat. I'm in the faith, but I draw no active love. I sing the hymns with those next to me, but I hear only my own voice. When the service is finished, I leave as I came in -- hungry for someone to touch me, to tell me that I'm a person worth something to somebody. Just a smile would do it, or perhaps some gesture, some sign that I am not a stranger."*

## VI. WHAT DOES GOD HAVE TO SAY TO SINGLES? (I Cor. 7: 8, 32-40)

- 1. Acknowledge your singleness:** (vs. 1, 8, 26) Three times God says something is good... what is that? Singleness, yet so many singles think that being single means something not so good or it is to be second class.
- 2. Accept singleness as a gift from God.** *"Are you kidding?" A gift??* Yes a gift from God. (I Cor. 7:7) Each person has his proper gift from God, one after this manner and another after that. Sometimes God gives the gift of being single; to be married is a gift of God, and being single is a gift of God also. Compare with Matthew 19:12.
- 3. Allow your singleness to be a source of growth.** This is a choice, like many things are choices. It is not wrong to seek marriage, but it is wrong to let that search dominate your life. Remember that a lot of married people are not happy, it is not the supreme goal of our lives, to put all our energy into trying to find a mate. Learn to be in God's will and be content. There is some thing far worse than single loneliness and that is marital misery." (Cf I Tim. 6:6; Phil 4:11) If God has a mate for you, He knows how to bring the two of you together!
- 4. Activate Your singleness for God. Make much of your opportunity to serve HIM in your single state.**

A single person is free from the stress and strain of marital life, free to devoted his, her life to God. There is not a Christian man or woman who wholeheartedly loves God but who does not have to struggle with priorities. How much time belongs to God? How much time belongs to others? How can all of us - single or married -- put this together so there is a balance that is pleasant to the Lord. That's the kind of a struggle we ought to be involved in. If we are

married then the family is a priority in God's plan and economy of things. We cannot neglect our home and marriage.

If you are not married then you don't have a family, you can give yourself totally to God without the pressure of those relationships. You can be totally consumed with serving God in your life.

If you are single you may say: *"What in the world does that have to do with my loneliness?"* Well, it has everything to do with your loneliness. People who are lonely as singles are people who are worrying about what is or is not happening to them. Instead of what they should be doing to minister to others.

It is okay to be single. If you are single, God has a special plan for you too. A plan that includes reaching out and helping others. The answer to your need and aloneness -- your feeling that you are not part of what is going on -- is not to wait until somebody gives, but to keep giving yourself. Discover that in serving God it starts coming back to you and meeting the needs in your own life.

- 5. Affirm Your Singleness With Gratitude.** (Eph. 5:20) In the subject of loneliness the supreme answer is a spirit of thanksgiving. It is hard to be lonely when you are thankful, because thanksgiving means taking spiritual inventory of your blessings. You realize that although you may physically be alone, God has done many good things to minister to your needs.

Praise God for what ever your lot may be. Maybe it is best not to be married, or to remarry so be happy with God's will. (Phil. 4:19; 4:11)

- a. Singles have a lot of love to give away. (Rom. 5: 5)
- b. The need of belonging is responded to by my willingness to commit myself to something - to be vulnerable to God, to a ministry, to a group, to a friends and not to shy away from committing myself and therefore to don't feel as if I belong. Give yourself!
- c. Loneliness is not always bad. In fact on occasion it may be the very thing that will draw you to God, and to prayer.

- 6. God recognizes Your need** -- Christ knew what loneliness meant, Christ experienced being forsaken even by His father as well as forsaken by man. He knows what loneliness is! (Rom. 8:32; Heb. 4:14-16)

## **LONELINESS -- KNOWN AND EXPERIENCED**

Why is there so much loneliness? Why is it such a problem today? While the word itself is not found in the Word of God, yet there is much that is evident about loneliness from cover to cover in this book.

We could be overwhelmed with the many times we see illustrations about people who battled with loneliness from the very first family right on through the pages of the Scriptures.

## I. THE REALITY OF LONELINESS:

We go back to the book of Genesis to the very first family and we see the beginning of loneliness, separation, a wall between, or a great gulf fixed. WHY?

- A. Adam and Eve due to sin experienced one of the results: "HIDING"
1. They hid from God, because of sin and they naturally were hiding from one another. The sin and the guilt, and loss that kept them from a clear conscience and freedom before God kept them from a closeness, and freedom with one another. Ever since then man because of his sin has hidden himself (herself) psychologically, physically, mentally, in separation and a wall is built. The true self is hidden as inner sorrows, joys, burdens, etc., are also kept hidden. We live a facade before others.
  2. We hide emotionally; we hide true needs and feelings. We hide and do not share the true self so we are lonely under our own roof, yes, lonely while with others. We cannot feel free to share true self, bare or make bare the inner man. So we go on "*trying to prove we are the strong man*" trying to prove all is okay. Compare with James 5:16; Rom. 15:7; Rom 15:1.
- B. Enoch -- walked with God and one of the results-- quite apart from his contemporaries was he walked a different path and stood out as a shining star on a dark night. And he was not for God took him.
- C. Noah -- was lonely as he experienced the ridicule of a wicked age. To many these were absurd instructions - to build a boat where there was no water, had never been rain, to build for the saving of his household and at that time he did not have any children. Doubtless he was subject to abuse but he did what God told him to do, walking by faith but no doubt suffered the loneliness of **rejection** by his peers.
- D. Hagar (Gen. 16) is the story of one who experienced loneliness; Problems not of her own making totally Abraham's wife, Sarah (for she was barren) gave her Egyptian handmaid to Abraham for a wife. Late she had a child and hostility between those two women grew to a boiling point. Sarah banished Hagar to the wilderness. As you read the story you cannot miss the stress of her loneliness. She is all by herself, away from family, friends. There is no one there yet God met her at that time.
- E. Abraham was command to go to Mt Moriah, and take the object of his love; his only son the hope and promise of a coming nation, and put him to death. Abraham must have felt very isolated in that experience that he could not even take his servants with him. He and his son went together alone to that mountain, and there God spoke to him redemptively. What a burden, a lonely time, a great trial, and heart-ache... to go... do.. obey..!
- F. Moses -- a man apart- read his story in Exodus while working in Pharaoh's court he must have felt very lonely. By himself; not understood by either his own or the Egyptians. In anger Moses murdered an Egyptian the result was a flight into the wilderness. Now he was wandering around on the backside of the desert, caring for sheep. He must have experienced great loneliness. He was a man of many sorrows -- not understood or accepted by any, fully, or truly!! He was being prepared for the task to which God would

call him in a special way.

- H. David, the psalmist knew deep loneliness. We are indebted to him because he put into the words of his psalms the way a lonely person cries out to the Heavenly Father. (Psa 102:3, 6, 7) **David was lonely because of many crisis, rejections and loss.** He spoke of it this way, *"My days are consumed like smoke, my bones are burned like glowing embers; I am like a pelican in the wilderness. I am like an owl of the desert, I watch and am as a sparrow alone on the housetop."* David wrote in Psalm 69:20 *"Reproach hath broken my heart: and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none."* David expressed his loneliness in a way we can identify with as he was hated, hunted, and hounded by King Saul.
- I. Job stands out especially as the extreme example of a lonely man. Nowhere did he find a receptive response, even his wife said, *"Curse God and die."* He felt that even God had abandoned him. He was an Island among humankind, confronting the pain of his being. His heart must have been very heavy as his miserable comforters confronted him that all his problem was the depth of his own sin and yet he tried to maintain the truth of his integrity. He was misunderstood, maligned, sorrowful, cut off, bleed inwardly, and totally alone.
- J. When we leave the paths of the Old Testament and walk into the New Testament we are introduced to the disciples called by the Savior to help, to walk with Him in His earthly ministry. We read the story and we immediately note the **growing emotions of fear and anxiety** that must have well up in them as the Savior begins to talk about HIS impending death. They hurt with the misunderstanding that surrounded the loneliness of their knowledge. CHRIST, early in his ministry warned His disciples *"Behold the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own and shall leave ME alone."* (Jh 16:32) Christ knew great loneliness. (Isa 53) He knew intimately that it was coming -- all the anguish that went with the anticipation of the fact He would be made sin for us. At the garden of Gethsemane He asked, *"Will you stay here and watch and pray with me?"* Agonizing over God's will in His life and the impending judgment of sin He would carry the SAVIOR EXPERIENCED EXTREME, MAXIMUM LONELINESS. Friends fled, the world rejected HIM and in agony of that hour, we hear words, *"My God, My God why hast Thou forsaken me?"* (Matt 27:46) He was lonely beyond description.

## II. GOD'S COMFORT TO THE LONELY:

- A. For Hagar -- (Gen. 16) God especially ministers to this lonely one. God met her alone, there, in wilderness by herself. When she realized that God saw her, loved her, and met her need she name a memorial to God's awareness of a lonely person.
- B. Unto Abraham -- (Gen 22) God met him the depths of the trial and the loneliness that he must have felt at that time.

At the exact moment, in Abraham's need (the testing having gone far enough) and he had met the test, God broke the silence and spoke to him. (Gen. 22:11-13) And Abraham called the name of that place, JEHOVAH-

JIREH (vs. 14) literally "*The Lord will provide*".

God is willing to meet us and touch us, when all alone and hurting; God also shows HIS care for us the same way HE met the need of others.

- C. **Moses** -- When alone in the desert-- God spoke to him in the burning bush, calls him and prepared him for a special service. **Job** met God in his loneliness in the midst of his tragic life. God spoke to him out of the whirlwind for no longer was God seemingly absent. HE was present, (Job 42:5). **David** knew God's precious care for him as seen in many portions. Consider especially Psalm 23 or Psalm 27:1. **Jesus spoke peace** to His disciples as seen in John 14:1; 14:27; 14:16. I will give another COMFORTER: THE HOLY SPIRIT to meet your needs, one who stands beside you will meet your need.

**CHRIST THE ONE WHO HAS EXPERIENCED EVERY KIND OF EMOTION FOR US -- (Heb. 14:16; Heb. 2:18) -- will meet YOUR NEED. He knows all about it!**

### **III. THE OUTWORKING OF GOD'S PURPOSE IN OUR LIVES:**

God has a purpose or many purposes in allowing loneliness in our lives for He wants to:

- A. Reveal HIS love and power in the midst of that experience.**
- B. He desires to manifest HIS grace in the midst of the loneliness.**
- C. He desires to effect HIS will and plan through that experience.**

1. For **David** it was to prepare him and to use him in the writing of Psalms that would bless us.
2. For **Job** it was to manifest HIMSELF to Job in a new way and to use him for all to see the Grace of God and the wisdom of God in the midst of all anguish!!
3. And God wants to bring glory to Himself. It is **for our sakes He allows loneliness** that we may be an example of walking with God by faith, trusting, believing God.

### **IV. MAINTAINING A GOOD MENTAL ATTITUDE IN THE MIDST OF LONELINESS:**

#### **HOW?**

- A. **Know WHO you are IN CHRIST:** Eph. 1:6; WHY am I here, alive anyway? (Eph. 2:10; 1:12; 1:4-5; II Cor. 6:4-17)
- B. **ACCEPT YOURSELF** as God has made you and your lot in life as HIS perfect plan: (Rom. 8:32; Psa. 84:11; Psa 37:23; I Thess 5:18; Phil. 2:13)
- C. **Develop a THANKSGIVING ATTITUDE:** Only two groups of people -- grippers and thankers; groaners and praisers; grippers are never happy; thankers always are. You have the capacity to be either but if you allow the Holy Spirit



to control your mind you will be a thanker. (Psa. 1; Eph. 5:18-21; I Thess. 5:18; Psa 145-150) Do not permit negative, critical, ungrateful, moody thoughts.

- D. **LEARN to be CONTENT** where God has put you, and in what God is doing in your life! ( I Tim. 6:6; Phil. 4:11; Heb. 13:5) We so often think that if the circumstances were different, then we could be happy. God is the God of the circumstances. (Rom. 8:28,29) God has a perfect will for you. He is more concerned about your condition spiritually than your circumstances; (II Cor. 12: 1-9)
- E. **ABOVE ALL PUT AWAY ANY SIN** that the Holy Spirit convicts you of for sin in your life will bring a great loss. How can you be what God wants you to be or receive from His hand His will and blessing if sin blocks the ministry of the Lord to your life? Sin blasts, destroys, and can bring judgment as well. If you study I Corinthians 11:28-32 and Hebrews 12:5-13 you will be aware the unjudged sin will bring God's chastening in your life. When we have unconfessed sin (Prov. 28:13; I John 1:7-9) we can't expect to have answered prayer or spiritual blessings upon our singleness. In fact, we will experience depression, guilt and frustration because of sin that we have not dealt with, confessed and brought before God in repentance. May the Holy Spirit lead in our life as you allow Him to guide, convict and direct you.

***He is sovereign; He is working out HIS sovereign will. Cooperate; be the yielded vessel and allow HIM to be the surgeon with full rights to the instrument -- your life -- spirit, soul and body.***