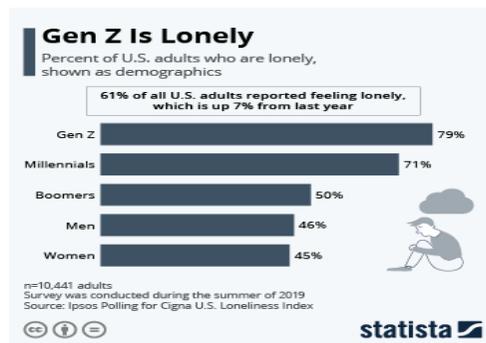


“LIVING WITH LONELINESS” (Genesis 2:18; Acts 2:46-47)

One of the greatest problems that affect humanity is loneliness. One of the most celebrated literary giants of the twentieth century was HG Wells. Yet, he confessed on his birthday, “I am sixty-five, and I am lonely, and I have never found peace.” Most surveys in developed countries reveal that this problem is growing, as we become more isolated from one another especially through the rise of impersonal means of communication. This sense of loneliness can be intensified because of guilt, rejection, jealousy, selfishness, misunderstanding, low self-esteem, sickness, failure, fear of crime, and mistreatment. Surrounded by people in a home, school, office or even in a church you may not be alone but you can be very lonely. Henry David Thoreau once noted of urban life that a “city is a place where hundreds of people are lonely together.”



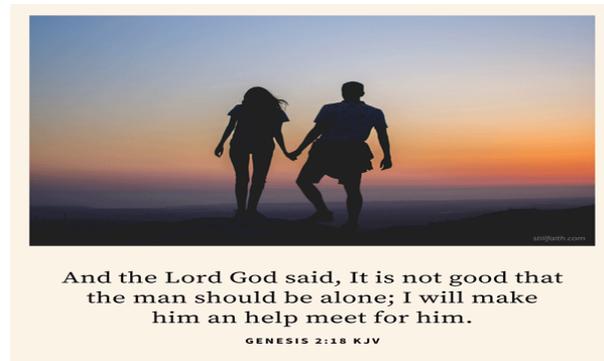
You can also be very busy and successful but still feel a profound sense of loneliness. Life is hard at the best of times and ultimately empty when lived without God. People get involved in inappropriate relationships, change jobs or join clubs in the hope of finding some friendship. Many cannot sleep without the light on or cannot enter a home without music playing or a television switched on to drown the pain of their lonely hearts.

(1) ROOT OF LONELINESS

Before the Fall, God identified the need for man to be connected to others, “*And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*” (Gen. 2:18) This was the first negative judgment on the original creation and it is a statement against loneliness. God made man with an innate desire for divine fellowship and human companionship. A wife was to be that primary companion for most men, although singlehood can be sovereignly appointed for some as the exception to the general rule (1 Cor. 7:7-9). Of course that means that a Christian couple should spend time with one another and not lead effectively separate lives. One writer explained,

“God recognized Adam’s need for contact with another human being - a need God had built into him. More than just a fellow inhabitant of Eden, Eve would be the object of Adam’s love and would love him in return. She would share the wonders of creation and

the responsibilities of stewardship. With the creation of Eve, Adam’s intimate relationship with God was complemented by communion and companionship with someone like himself. By God’s design we have an innate need to be loved and belong. As children we learn to give and receive affection and are taught the skills that will help us find acceptance in society. Through our relationships with family, friends, co-workers and others, we form our sense of individuality and find our place in the mosaic of life. It’s when that need for affection and fellowship goes unfulfilled, that we become restless, unhappy...lonely.



Sin brought estrangement, mistrust, and disagreement between the first couple. Both had a sense of loneliness they never experienced before. For Adam complained that Eve (and God for creating her!) was why he fell, “*And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.*” (Gen. 3:12)

God warned that humanity would be afflicted by many divisions. The most fundamental one will be a spiritual division. The Lord detailed this to the serpent, “*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.*” (Gen. 3:15a) The devil will have his seed (John 8:44; Eph. 2:2-3) but he will not take all of humanity with him. God will choose out a seed for Himself that will wage war in the “battle of the ages” with the serpent. The lives of Cain and Abel personify that clash. That war is seen right throughout biblical history and is still being fought through the church (Eph. 6:12). The home would be a battleground, “*Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.*” (Gen. 3:16) Adam will grasp the truth of this as he toils against the world, the flesh, and the devil for the next 930 years. The sense of estrangement from our fellow man soon manifested itself in the children of the First Family. Cain and Abel were spiritually like “chalk and cheese.” For one was a man of faith and the other was a man of the flesh. The led to Cain eventually murdering his own brother. This depraved sin led to further estrangement. Cain was cursed by God, “*a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.*” (Gen. 4:12b)

Cain is a classic example of the lonely life of the discontented wicked. *From the moment sin entered the world, mankind forever lost perfect peace and harmony.* The Bible warns, “*There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked*” (Isa. 48:22). Isaiah also pictured sinners living a life like turbulent dark seas,

But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. (Isa. 57:20-21).

These verses in Isaiah led to the popular maxim, “There is no rest for the wicked.” For all sinners live lonely and discontented lives. Nothing they involve themselves in brings any permanent satisfaction or eternal significance. The world mourns in its songs like Don Quixote for the unreachable star. They cry, “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For!” It is not that they don’t seek happiness and satisfaction but the problem is people seek it the wrong way and for it in the wrong things. They end up in a spiritual dead end, “*I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*” (Ecclesiastes 1:14) The liberal philosopher, Edmund Burke famously summed up this despairing state of fallen man, “What shadows we are, what shadows we pursue.”



LONELINESS OF BELIEVERS - It is somewhat easy to understand why unbelievers are lonely because they live for self and are estranged from their Creator. What is more difficult to grasp is why many believers have a deep sense of loneliness. After all, we have “*a friend that sticketh closer than a brother*” (Prov. 18:24). Yet many believers feel alone.

Job lamented, “*My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me*” (Job 19:14) The Psalmist David described having a sense of being forsaken by God, “*How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?*” (Psa. 13:1). Elijah felt so alone that he asked God to take away his life as he argued, “*I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away*” (1 Kings 19:10). The weeping prophet, Jeremiah had a profound sense of isolation, “*O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me*” (Jer. 20:7). This became so bad that Jeremiah determined to give up his ministry, “*Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name*” (Jer. 20:9).

So loneliness is a problem that can strike the very strongest of God’s saints. The life of living by faith and not by sight is not an easy one. The Bible never promises that the Christian life will be an easy one. Good times and bad times are part of the portion of the circumstances of a believer. One trouble often leads to another too. It is important to grasp that loneliness is not the same as being alone. Loneliness is more the case of feeling alone and friendless. Even the very word loneliness sounds sad. The concept of loneliness is not easy to define. Warren Wiersbe defined it,

“Like many other feelings in our lives, it’s easier to experience it than to define it. Loneliness is being all by yourself even when you’re surrounded by people. Loneliness is a feeling of isolation even in the midst of a crowd. You feel unwanted. You feel unneeded. You feel as though there’s nothing to live for. You feel as though nobody really cares anymore. That’s loneliness. Loneliness eats away at the inner person. It saps you of strength. It robs you of hope, Loneliness, as it were puts a wall around you no matter how free you may be.”

(2) REMEDY FOR LONELINESS

The world has its remedies for loneliness but, ultimately, they all fail. The more honest admit it is pointless. Atheist movie director, Orson Welles noted in despair, “We’re born alone, we live alone, we die alone. Only through our love and friendship can we create the illusion for the moment that we’re not alone.”

The Bible instructs us to a number of remedies to deal with the problem of loneliness. It stems from repairing the broken relationship between God and mankind. For when a person is saved, he enters into spiritual fellowship with his heavenly Father, “*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*” (1 John 1:3; cf. John 14:23) That then binds us to a great family of believers of every age. Our “brothers and sisters” inhabit every corner of the planet.

(A) REMEDY OF GOD’S PERSON AND PROMISES

Wiersbe once observed that loneliness results from “the malnutrition of the soul that results from living on substitutes.” When we forget God’s Person and Promises and turn to other things, we can fall into despair. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we can never protect ourselves from pain and struggle, but God won’t leave us alone. A critical key to overcoming loneliness is resting on the pillars of the promises of God.

One of the greatest promises in all of Scripture, “*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*” (Heb. 13:5). In the original Greek, there are five negatives to emphasise that the Lord will not forsake us. In Greek grammar when more negatives are piled up it is to convey a more intensified meaning. So a literal rendering could be, “For He hath said, I will never, never leave thee; I will never, never, never forsake thee.” God wants to make it crystal clear that this is an eternal promise to all of His children. The hymn writer, John Rippon picking up this theme, puts it in beautiful language,

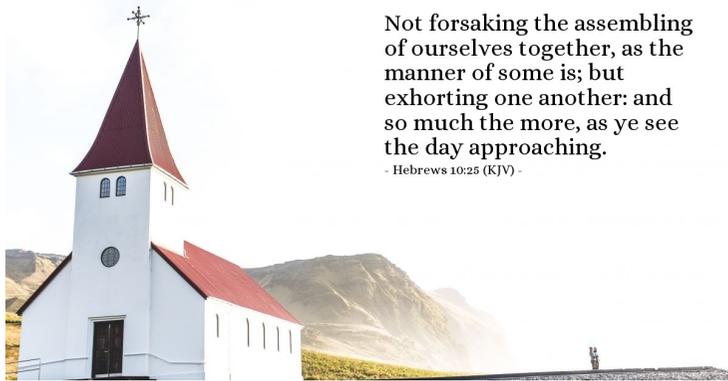
*The soul that on Jesus doth lean for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake.*

Times may be hard when you pass through the deep waters and the fiery trials but God is never hard to His children. Many will forsake you but the Lord Jesus never will forsake you. They hymn writer seeks to convey that glorious truth by saying emphatically 3 times, “*never, no never, no never forsake.*”

In the OT we read the story of Joseph. After being a blessing to the chief butler, we read, “Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him” (Gen. 40:23). The long months dragged by but Joseph discovered that the Lord never forsook him. His whole imprisonment was a time when, “the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper” (Gen. 39:23). God’s plan is not always easily seen at every point along the way. But living by faith means staking everything on the promises and person of God. There is no plan B!

We must make a careful distinction here between solitude and loneliness. Solitude is a voluntary choice to be alone that can be refreshing whereas loneliness is something forced upon the individual and brings sorrow to the heart. Another distinction is that we can choose to end our period of solitude whereas loneliness cannot so easily be forsaken. So, there are times that you can be alone without being lonely. The Lord Jesus often went to be alone in prayer yet He was in perfect peace as He communed with His Father.

The apostle Paul experienced being forsaken by men in his last days, “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge” (2 Tim. 4:16). This did not overcome Paul because he testified, “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion” (2 Tim. 4:17). The realisation of the presence of the Lord helped Paul to overcome any sense of loneliness.



Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

- Hebrews 10:25 (KJV) -

(B) REMEDY OF GOD’S PEOPLE

God did not create man to be isolated. We are to be interconnected with others. A Christian marriage and family help greatly in building strong bonds of fellowship and friendship. As well as marriage, we are also to have other friends within the body of Christ. The OT states the principle that we are better with others, “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Prov. 27:17; cf. Eccl. 4:9-11). The NT repeatedly emphasises the importance of local churches in increasing our effectiveness for the Lord. One of the things that is particularly striking about the early church in the Book of Acts was their continuous joy in corporate worship together. However, later the writer of the book of Hebrews commanded,

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Heb 10:24-25)

This word “forsaking” means “desertion” or “abandoning when you should be helping.” This is how the Bible views those who carelessly treat attendance in the Church on the Lord’s Day. It was clear that early in the NT era there were professing Christians who often were absent from worship in their local assembly as he says, “as the manner of some is.”

Of course the chief object of coming for corporate church gatherings is to worship God. However, a divinely ordained by-product of this corporate worship is the friendship and service that believers have with and for others. We read that we must, “consider one another” which means we need to take our thoughts from self unto others. This word “provoke” has the idea of stimulating or encouraging one another to live better. This will be in serving one another. All are commanded to do this and not just the leaders. This can be done by: prayer, example, doing deeds of kindness, and saying words of encouragement. Make sure you diligently attend church services, join fellowship groups, and seek out any opportunities to get to know others. Christians who avoid getting involved in church activities cut themselves off from a rich source of real friendship.



The early church was not a place of loneliness but of caring and sharing for one another. Naturally, they had to take an interest and “consider one another” in order to do this. Interestingly, this word “consider” is in the present continuous tense indicating that this is to be our habitual practice and not just a one off! All too often in the turbulence of life we only focus on our own feelings and needs. In the books of Acts we read of the spirit of this ideal church,

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. (Acts 2:46-47)

The church should be a place of friendship and encouragement for the hurting soul. As the proverb says, “a word spoken in due season, how good is it!” (Prov. 15:23) When King David was at one of his lowest points in the wilderness after having being betrayed by the Ziphites, the Lord

sent a great friend Jonathan to encourage the troubled soul, “*And Jonathan Saul’s son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.*” (1 Samuel 23:16) Just read how many times the Lord Jesus spoke words of encouragement to troubled souls in the Gospel accounts. George Herbert, an English pastor and poet, said, “Good words are worth much, and cost little.” Tragically, it is all too often the opposite where people come to church with their “gift of discouragement” and isolate those who are lonely. Even the apostle Paul found some churches a place where he was attacked and discouraged. Paul had to warn one church, “*But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another*” (Gal. 5:15).

It should also be noted how many great friends in many different places Paul lists in his epistles. Even a man like him needed the friendship and service of co-labourers like a couple like Priscilla and Aquilla or a young companion like Timothy. Indeed, rarely do we see Paul alone in the book of Acts. If a great man like him needed friends and co-labourers, it should teach us that we should not try to live in a spiritual solitary confinement. There will be much to discourage you when you look at the lives of most believers. But look for the evidences of God’s grace, even in the weakest saint.

It is often observed that the warm fellowship of a church will keep your heart from growing cold. **It is not enough to hear the sermon and then exit with no connection to anyone.** We are called to interact with one another such as praying for one another or eating together. John Wesley once said, “There is nothing more unchristian than a solitary Christian.” It is not physically possible to interact with every believer in a local church but we can at least try and do something for at least some.



Many people come to church and put on a front of happiness but deep down they are lonely and crave friendship. We all could do better at being a friend to those around us. Just inviting a person for a meal or even a coffee could be just what is needed, “*Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unaware.*” (Heb. 13:1-2). The lonely believer also needs to take the initiative and reach out actively to others. You should not passively wait till the phone rings but go out and seek friendships. Take the first step and give some other believers a text or a call. You might find a friend that is just as lonely.

CONCLUSION

Loneliness can be overcome. God has provided various means to help us. But we must use the means. Never forget as important as people are in our lives, they cannot be with us always. However, God never will leave us. And when God is all you have, you will discover that God is all you need. We can be at peace today. The saint whom God saves, He keeps, and He sustains. The Lord cannot and will not forsake His own. The certainty of this rests not in ourselves but on the character of God. In Him there is help for lonely people.

The storms of our life only prove the strength of our Anchor. Fear should leave us when we remember that God is always with us, “*for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*” (Heb. 13:5). Learn to take this incredible promise and apply it to your life daily. Countless saints have proven this throughout the ages. So can you today when you look by faith on this firm foundation of God’s promises.

No matter what your problems are now, He will never leave you.

No matter how you feel about it, He will never leave you.

No matter what comes to your life this week, He will never leave you.

It cost God the most precious thing in the world to redeem us – His beloved Son. God will not abandon the one He has given so much to save. We are His children and God always is faithful to us even when we are unfaithful. Remind yourself of this today and then remind others. We are in this journey of life together all the way to glory. Be a friend to the lonely heart, as this will make you like Christ who is the greatest friend to you.

*Earthly friends may prove untrue,
Doubts and fears assail;
One still loves and cares for you;
One who will not fail.*

*Jesus never fails,
Jesus never fails,
Heav’n and earth may pass away,
But Jesus never fails.*