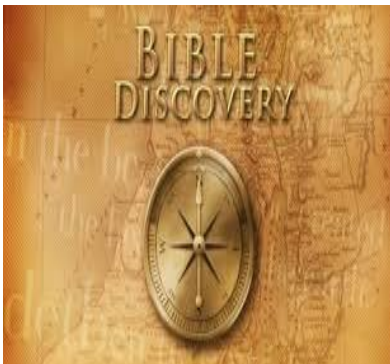


Being Lonely yet Never Alone

¹⁹ Therefore, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.



While this side of heaven, we can expect there'll be periods in which loneliness creeps into the valleys of life. In our human experiences we face moments of loneliness when someone close to us fails to listen or seemingly fails to understand; or when we feel abandoned or deserted; or during long winter days, hospital stays - even because of chronic pain. Loneliness bursts in as you watch your child drive down the driveway - off to college - with you wondering where time has gone for it seems you were just watching them head off on their bicycle to a friend down the block. Loneliness also accompanies some of life's most distressing moments - betrayal of a friend or family member, the loss of a job, the death of a loved one.

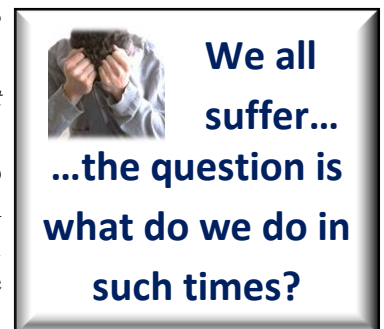
Ever notice loneliness never comes alone? It always brings friends - the kind that makes lousy houseguests! Loneliness bids you say hello to worry and despair. "Will this emptiness I'm feeling ever go away?" your heart cries out. Another "friend" to loneliness is vulnerability to self-deception: 'My friends've all deserted me'; 'No one loves me or cares'; 'If only...' - each brings the belief that you're in this alone and there's no way out. Ever been there? Then there's the 'friend' who says you're the only one in the world to feel such loneliness, to be abandoned. Of course reason is pushed to the sidelines, left on the doorstep.

I remember reading years ago of a man who came up to a preacher, stared him in the face, and somewhat belligerently spewed, "*Religion's a crutch!*" The pastor gently examined the man in return and kindly responded, "*That may be true, son, but who isn't limping?*" The truth is we all suffer, we all ache, and we're all lonely at some point. The question is what do we do in such times? Do we look for distractions? Do we abandon our faith and "join in with the crowd"? Or do we wait on our heavenly Father? The Psalmist understood the benefit of patiently waiting for God. When facing life's challenges he wrote, "*O my God, I trust in you; let me not be ashamed; let not my enemies triumph over me. Indeed, let no one who waits on you be ashamed.*" [Psalms 25:2-3 NKJV] Loneliness can become a stumbling block that leads to our enemies having triumph over us, but as with any of life's challenges, our God wants to use our experiences of loneliness as stepping stones to advance our walk with Him to greater *Christlikeness*. And God, if we let Him, will turn those challenges into opportunities to share His love with others. Rather than giving into loneliness we can persevere trusting God has a plan, believing Christ is with us, having set the example, having endured suffering, having overcome.

There's a wonderful scripture at James 1:2-4 which I want to share with you from *The Message* translation as we examine God's place in the midst of our challenges, such as loneliness in our lives...

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Trials were certainly no strangers to the early readers of the letter written to "*The Hebrews*". Life often centered on the goddess Diana. Her temple even housed the banking center. Conversion to Christ in this pagan culture meant not only estrangement from family and friends, but being shut off from commerce, from making a living, looking after family. Recipients of the Hebrews letter were wanderers - driven from their homeland -



fighting loneliness amidst fleeing for their lives and remaining ostracized by a society moving completely in the opposite direction. However, and this we want to hold fast to, God's resources sustained and transformed His people in the midst of their loneliness, despite their circumstances. We too are blessed with memories of trials the Lord has permitted in our lives which through the rearview mirror we see the steps of the Saviour walking alongside of us. We too, looking back, recognize though we've experienced times when we've been lonely, yet we've never been alone! Go ahead, think back for a moment – How has God helped and sustained you during times of loneliness?

As with any challenge, loneliness always affords us opportunity to turn to Christ, to increase our knowledge of Him, and to cultivate our relationship with Him. Hebrews 10:19-24 certainly are scriptures to turn to when doubt assails us and the enemy blasts us with the stormy gales of life in the trenches. It's in these low moments we remember the confidence we have to enter the Most Holy Place because of the shed blood of God's Son, Jesus our Lord and Saviour. He's indeed the new and living way – in fact the everlasting way! And He's not without understanding of what we're going through. Remember how Jesus spoke of Himself, "*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head*".

[Luke 9:58] Consider Christ's response to Peter, James and John as they slept instead of remaining alongside Him in prayer during that night in the Garden of Gethsemane: "*Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?*" [Matthew 26:40] This after Jesus had poured out his heart to them, "*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.*" [vs. 38] Jesus knew loneliness.

Loneliness affords opportunity to turn to Christ, to increase our knowledge of Him, and to cultivate our relationship with Him.

Jesus does more...

- **He works in us**
- **He equips us**
- **He Transforms us**



Knowing He understands, Jesus is the One to whom we rightly draw near to combat the loneliness that creeps in unbidden into our lives. He's the One who's promises never to leave or forsake us. He knows us, He cares for us. Yet He does something even more glorious than simply sharing our emotions; He works in us giving us His Spirit to dwell within us in the midst of our loneliness. As He equips us, He takes our loneliness using it to stretch and mold us into vessels with an increased capacity to know Him, to trust Him, to reflect His glory. He transforms us in the midst of our lonely times.

As the Hebrew readers were challenged by these words so many years ago, though scattered and tempted to renounce Christ; to replace Him with empty, temporary diversions; to seek after relationships which would dishonour Him and fail them, we too must guard against allowing ourselves to be burdened by overloading ourselves with work, hobbies, commitments and expectations which leave us alone and lonely, keeping us from "*drawing near to God with sincere hearts in full assurance of faith*".

We either draw near to God through Christ – or we draw away from Him in a downward spiral. Our choices determine our direction. We've been given an amazing gift whereby we, sinners all, have been cleansed, washed clean, sprinkled spiritually with the sacrifice of Christ our Lamb of God and we're washed with the pure water of His grace and mercy. What is our response?

Loneliness may be present in the seasons of our life but it need not master us!

Let it be we give ourselves to walking with God even in our loneliness, spending time with Him in prayer, reading His Word, seeking His strength and His interpretation of our circumstance. Let us give our attention to serving and loving others, rather than simply trying to distract ourselves with them. Remember Jesus calls us to visit people in their most vulnerable moments reminding us that *when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!* [Matthew 25:40] Loneliness may be present in the seasons of our life but we don't have to allow it to master us. We've only one master – He's the Lord Jesus Christ! In the end, it's best to become more like Him, the only Master worthy of our service, worthy of our devotion and time, worthy of our adoration and love – when we choose to walk through our loneliness through faith in Him.

Only then can your Lord use you as the Holy Vessel He desires you become. As you hold unswervingly to the hope you profess, not allowing your life to be shunted onto the side-rails of ineffective faith, you'll truly

“consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” That will cause the enemy to flee keeping you in fellowship sweet and full. As we are united in Christ, fully blessed and prepared for service, we

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find our commitment to others is fully rallied in the midst of our loneliness! Did you hear that? Even while you're experiencing loneliness, God will send you and use you for others. As you spend time with others - the lonely, the sick and the hurting, remember you're truly imitating Jesus as well as ministering to Him [ref: Matthew 25:35-36]. He provides what we need so that we in turn may reveal His compassionate heart to others and have our own hearts filled with joy rather than loneliness.

Knowing that, you can either use those whom He brings around you for your own goals – to meet your own end - and perhaps end up avoiding them out of frustration and disappointment all together, OR, you can respond to them with God-given love, being filled with God's presence, anointed with God's Spirit, following Christ's perfect example, and in commitment and service watch the Christlikeness that blossoms. I can promise you, we will have times of loneliness. How you choose to respond to your loneliness says it all!

If you are interested in knowing more of how Jesus overcomes loneliness in your life and gives purpose for you to follow, give us a call or an email. We'd love to hear from you.

Blessings,

Pastor Dave