

February 7, 2010 PM

THE SEASON OF LONELINESS

2 Timothy 4:6-21

I. Four causes of loneliness.

God made us to have relationships ... ***“It is not good for man to be alone.” (Genesis 2:18)*** In our text we have Paul’s last words that he had the opportunity to write. He will soon have his life taken. He is in prison and is struggling with loneliness.

A. Transitions cause loneliness.

1. Life is a series of transitions and change always brings a sense of loss.
2. When I say yes to one thing I am automatically saying no to other things.
3. Transitions bring change and change brings loneliness.

“As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. ⁸ And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.” (2 Tim. 4:6-8, NLT)

***NOTE** There are many lonely people in our world. Statistics show that 70% of elderly people in nursing homes never get a visit from anyone. Being a soldier is also lonely, and missionaries are very often lonely.

B. Separation causes loneliness.

“Do your best to come to me quickly...do your best to get here before winter.” (vs. 9 & 21)

1. The absence of friends and family to share with was felt.

2. His companions had left him.

NOTE** Paul's spiritual gift was exhortation. He needed people in his life. The loneliness of solitude is hard on everyone. The worse punishment in prison is "solitary confinement." David said, ***"I am like a vulture in a far off wilderness, or like an owl alone in the desert. I lie awake, lonely as a solitary sparrow on the roof." (Psalm 102:6-7, LB)

"I am forgotten like a dead man, like a broken and discarded pot." (Psalm 31:12, LB)

"Their contempt has broken my heart; my spirit is heavy within me. If ever one would show some pity; if even one would comfort me!" (Psalm 69:20, LB)

3. We need to be aware of:

- The chronically ill.
- The shut-ins.
- The orphaned.
- The widows/widowers.

4. Each one is distinctively lonely.

5. Many guests visit us who are lonely.

6. They don't need to find a friendly church; they need a friend.

David prayed, ***"Turn thou to me and be gracious to me; for I am lonely and afflicted."*** (Psalm 25)

C. Opposition causes loneliness.

1. Paul felt rejection of evil intent.

"He...did me a great deal of harm...he strongly opposed our message."

2. We know that wounded emotions hurt longer than wounded bodies.

***NOTE** I don't remember many cuts and bruises I suffered on the playground, but I can still remember hurtful things spoken to me. Those words still hurt today.

3. Many know the loneliness of being the last one chosen or not being chosen at all;; or made fun of because of the way you looked or what you word. "Not being one of the cool people."
4. You know you did not stand a chance of being in the "in crowd."

***NOTE** Being alone is painful enough, but it is worse when you are experiencing grief and there is no one there for you who understand you're hurting when everyone else is laughing, or when you are misunderstood or embarrassed.

D. Rejection causes loneliness.

1. When you feel betrayed, forgotten and overlooked.
2. When you have been let down by people you thought you could count on.
3. Let me tell you, "God loves you and you matter."

Paul said, "***...no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me...Demas has forsaken me...***"

4. Demas may not have forsaken Christ, but he had deserted Paul.

How we try to deal with loneliness:

- Work lots of hours. We stay so busy we don't have to think about it.
- We go shopping. We try to fill loneliness with objects.
- We drink or take drugs to dull the pain with self-medication.
- We move from one relationship to another.
- We fantasize and use pornography.

All of these lead to depressed and self-defeating behavior.

II. How to deal with loneliness.

A. Utilize my time.

1. You endeavor to make the most of a bad situation.
2. Resist the temptation of doing nothing.

Paul said, “...*bring my coat...and bring my books...*” (vs. 12)

3. Paul thought, if I am going to be alone I ought to be comfortable and productive.
4. He’s not having a pity-party; he’s not feeling sorry for himself.

***NOTE** Champions for Christ may be lonely but they do not give up on life.” They ask, ‘Lord what can I do right now that I could not do in another season of life?’ Not why, but what?

When we are lonely and depressed we tend not to take very good care of ourselves. We don’t eat right (who wants to go out and eat alone?) We don’t exercise, we don’t do things that encourage us spiritually; read our Bibles, pray, go to church, or serve in ministry.

5. Paul was a people person and being in jail was the opposite of where he wanted to be.
6. We are still benefiting from Paul’s letters that were wrote while he was in prison and lonely.

QUESTION Is anyone going to benefit from your loneliness? Paul decided, “If I can’t be where the action is, I will create action where I am.”

B. Minimize my hurts.

1. Play it down and pray it up!
2. Don’t rehearse your hurt.

3. Refuse to become resentful.

“...everyone has deserted me. May it not be held against them!” (vs. 16)

No one was there for him, but he knew bitterness only made loneliness worse. The two feed each other. No one wants to be around a bitter, angry person.

4. Bitterness perpetuates loneliness.

C. Recognize God's presence.

“But the lord stood by my side and gave me strength.” (vs. 17)

1. When you're lonely, where is God? He is right by your side where He has always been.
2. Even if you don't feel it.

Jesus said, ***“I will never leave you or forsake you, even to the end of the age.”***

3. Loneliness is a time to become better acquainted with God.

David asked, ***“Where can I flee from your presence?”*** The answer is: “No where!”

D. Emphasize other's needs.

1. The loneliest person in the world is the selfish, self-centered person.
2. God wired us up to give our lives away; to help others.

***NOTE** Don't use the excuse, “I don't have any friends.” You need to find someone and “be a friend.”

3. Get your focus off yourself and look to a world that desperately needs someone to care.

***NOTE** A lot of loneliness is nothing more than a “fear to love.” We are afraid to be open to share our life, to let others in because we fear rejection.

4. Paul wanted to be used of God to help others. “...***So that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.***” (vs. 17)
5. Stop building walls and start building bridges.
6. You build a relationship with God. You become part of a caring family. The more you serve God, the more your relationship with him and others will grow.
7. How?
 - a. Cultivate the presence of Jesus.
 - b. Open your life up to God and others.
 - c. Start giving. Love God and others without thought of recompense or pay-off for your own ego.
 - d. Apply and appropriate Biblical principles of your own personal situation.
 - e. Set some definite goals for yourself and impose a time deadline for yourself and their accomplishment.
 - f. Start today.

***NOTE** The reason many are lonely is because they are expecting someone else to meet needs in their lives that only Jesus Christ can meet. They are too deep for another human to meet. People marry and divorce for the same reason: loneliness. Nobody will ever know you completely but God. What we often call loneliness is really homesickness for God. You just don't recognize it. You were made to have a personal relationship with God. No person, success, experience, drugs, or position can compensate for that. Nothing can fill the hole in your heart but God.

8. Open your heart to God. You need a relationship, not a religion. Not rules and regulations that are built on fear, but a relationship built on love and grace.
9. The reason so many Christians are lonely is because they are sitting and not servng. Others need you like you need others.
 - a. Nursing home.
 - b. Widows.
 - c. Singles who go home to an empty house.
 - d. Teens that are without someone to notice them.
10. Christians go through lonely time, but never go through it alone.

III. The greatest loneliness is to be separated from God.

“I sat alone, because thy hand was upon me.” (Jeremiah 15:17)

God sometimes lays hands on us. He wants to get us alone so that He can talk with us and deal with us in a personal way. Moses was alone in the wilderness when God appeared to him in the midst of the burning bush. He was alone on Mt. Sinai when he saw God’s glory.

A. The loneliness of sin.

1. Adam and Eve had fellowship with God until they sinned.
2. Their sin alienated them and separated them from God.
3. FACT: A praying man will stop sinning and a sinning man will stop praying.

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” (Psalm 66:18)

“I blush because of my iniquities.” (Ezra 9:6)

4. When Jesus bore our sin on the cross He cried, ***“My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)*** God will not make peace with sin in our heart.

B. The loneliness of separation.

1. When God gives up on you, that's the ultimate loneliness.

“My Spirit shall not always strive with man.” (Genesis 6:3)

2. Whenever the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin, thank God for it.

That means His Spirit is still striving with you.