

LONELINESS



NO LONGER ALONE



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LONELINESS...THE GREATEST POVERTY



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I sat on the porch and tried to console Jennifer, a 26-year-old woman with cerebral palsy. Earlier in the day a few volunteers at our Joni and Friends' Family Retreat had tried to send her to the "children's group." With her girlish grin and short blonde hair, Jennifer looks ten years old. Overcome with loneliness and discouragement, she cried, "Joni, I don't have any friends. I'm so *lonely*." I couldn't imagine the gut-wrenching emptiness Jennifer was feeling. And there are so many like her.

Like Jennifer, countless lonely people in the Bible cried out to God. One wrote, "Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted" (Ps. 25:16). Another described loneliness with a picturesque desert scene, "I am like a desert owl, like an owl among the ruins. I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof" (Ps. 102:6-7). And how many lonely people have read Ecclesiastes 4:11 and sighed where it says, "If two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?"

Perhaps you, too, are lonely. You may have little or no contact with other people. Maybe you are elderly and live a solitary life—you seldom get out and have few visitors. Possibly you are a widow or widower and your active social life of yesteryear has been exchanged for a quieter life that you did not desire. Or perhaps you are single and all of your friends have married or moved away. Or maybe you are like Jennifer—an illness or injury has isolated you, and you find yourself living a solitary life with few friends, if any.

But maybe you experience a different kind of loneliness. Maybe you rub shoulders with plenty of people but have no real and intimate contact with them. Discussion about the weather, sports, and fashions may fill your day, while the *real* issues of life—the kinds that eat at you when you lie awake thinking at night—stay harbored deep inside. The mountains you face are unknown to those you pass because there are some problems you simply cannot share.

Perhaps you are even more frustrated because the few people who do know you never include you in their inner circle. You are never invited to social events. And so you feel the crush of loneliness.

It makes no difference whether we are actually alone or simply lonely—if we get the feeling that our pains and sorrows are worthless and unproductive, we can be driven to despair.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE LONELY?

A lonely person feels a strong sense of emptiness and solitude, usually resulting from a lack of meaningful social relationships. After all, God created us to be social creatures. He meant for us to interact deeply with one another. Loneliness is a kind of social pain—a psychological trigger that alerts us to be aware of isolation and motivates us to seek social connections.

- Lack of friendships during childhood can aggravate loneliness in adulthood.
- Loneliness may be a symptom of a psychological problem, such as chronic depression.
- The loss of long-term, important relationships (divorce; the death of a spouse, parent, or child) can bring on loneliness. Loneliness is part of the “grief response.”
- Loneliness can occur within marriages or close relationships in which the feeling of love is neither given nor received.
- Loneliness coupled with physical pain can be a dangerous potion. You tire of always talking about your problems to others which, in turn, creates more isolation.



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God did not intend for us to live entirely alone, emotionally and physically disconnected from others.

“Loneliness and the feeling of being uncared for or unwanted are the greatest poverty.”

—Mother Teresa

The fact that you are reading this pamphlet shows that you want to move beyond your loneliness. You desire to be healed from your past and, in a fresh new way, reach out to God and others. You want to feel connected, not isolated; close, not far away; loved, not rejected; needed, not cast off. You want to leave loneliness behind!

LEAVING LONELINESS BEHIND

Remember Jennifer? That day on the porch I showed her Hebrews 13:5, which reads, “God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” That’s a promise God gives his people over and over (Deut. 31:6, 8; Josh. 1:5). He is especially near to Jennifer and lonely souls like her. Psalm 10:17 also assures us, “You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry.”

After our talk, Jennifer and I bowed our heads in prayer and asked God to fill her void. Three weeks later, Jennifer had signed up to volunteer at a local center for kids with cerebral palsy. It was her job, as she told me later with a proud smile, to go from crib to crib, pick up the little ones in diapers, and “just love on them all!” Jennifer found the answer to her prayer and her loneliness: loving others with cerebral palsy.

First Kings 22:5 says, “First seek the counsel of the Lord.” When one is lonely, cultivating intimacy with God is a good place to start! God says that when we seek close company with him, we will not only realize we are never alone, but we will see we can reach out to others who are in greater need.

Nothing fills the void quite like getting the focus off you and onto God—and then onto someone else in greater distress.



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Prayer: May my soul find rest in God alone; for my hope comes from him. You alone are my rock and my salvation. Help me to follow Jennifer's example and point others to you today.

“Language has created the word loneliness to express the pain of being alone, and the word solitude to express the glory of being alone.”

—Paul Tillich