

‘Growing through loneliness’. (4)

I would like to tell you a story, which I read in reader digest, it seems there was a young lady from the mid-west that had an opportunity for an excellent job in **Glasgow** and she was flown out there for an interview. She was a little nervous, she had never been to a big place and she was told that someone would pick her up so she got off the plane in **Glasgow airport**, there was a big crowd of people around the gate so she just waited. The crowd slowly began to disperse until finally there was just one man left in a very professional looking suit. And so she walked up to him and said, ‘**excuse me sir are you looking for someone named Diane?**’ Well his eyes got big and a smile came across his face and he walked towards her and gave her a big hug and a kiss and stepped back and said ‘**no.**’

And I guess the moral of the story is, we are surrounded by people who could use a hug. One of lives greatest pain is the pain of loneliness and it’s a pain that has visited, is visiting or will visit everyone in this room. The question of the morning is the next time loneliness visits you **will it be a time of groaning or growing?**

I just want to begin with this morning by saying God never intended for us to experience loneliness. In **Genesis** God created all of the heavens and earth, he said, ‘**it’s good**’ and when He created man He said in **Genesis 2:18** ‘**It’s not good for man to be alone.**’ But man had all the animals to have fellowship with and he even had an incredible relationship with God, but even at that, God said, ‘**it is not good that he is alone.**’ And so God worked to meet that need by providing him a wife and later telling him to multiply and have children.

We all need time alone with God but we weren’t created to live our lives in isolation from other people, we were created by God to need enriching personal relationships with others. **Barbara Streisand use to sing** ‘**people who need people are the luckiest people in the world**’. Wrong, people who need people are the **only** people in the world.

The curse of loneliness exists only because sin has entered into God’s creation and distorted this world into a place that God never intended it to be. Not only has sin corrupted our ability to have the relationship with God that we’re supposed to have. Sin has also impaired our ability to have rich relationships with our brothers and sisters. And the result is that, this world is full of something that God said, ‘**was not good.**’

Loneliness is not the same thing, as being alone, as everybody that lives in this city knows. You can be surrounded by thousands of people and still be lonely, you could be in this room right now and be lonely. Now loneliness is the feeling that the people who care for you aren’t there and the people who are there don’t care.

Loneliness is the kid at the new school, who doesn’t know anybody. It’s the girl in her house on another Friday night where nobody has called. It’s the new mum with a sick baby who hasn’t been out of the house in 3 weeks. It’s the single whose getting tired of people asking them what is wrong with them because they aren’t married. It’s the kid just mindlessly watching the TV trying to block out the screaming in her parent’s bedroom. It’s the women who gets up every Sunday and comes to worship by herself with the kids because her husband won’t get out of bed. It’s the guy who just got transferred overseas. It’s the person in the nursing home, who is hoping that somebody, anybody would come and visit today. It’s the person who has just left the cemetery and is fixing supper for one.

And if you are the apostle Paul, loneliness is sitting in a dark, damp cold prison cell with everybody you care about gone and the people that are there, don’t care. Look with me at **2 Timothy 4**, this was the last letter Paul ever wrote, probably written weeks or maybe just days before he was killed. And Paul is suffering from a struggle with loneliness he says in **2 Timothy 4:6** ‘**That the time for my departure has come**’, he knows that he is about to die. And we hear how he shares, how he is feeling when he talks to Timothy.

I don’t know of any man who has ever been a finer Christian than the apostle Paul and if anybody deserves in his last days to be supported by loads of other believers it was Paul but he wasn’t. He was in a prison cell about to die and only Luke could get in occasionally to see him and Paul was going through the pain of loneliness. And one of the points I want to make is that, some of God’s best people have been lonely. If you’re lonely today, that isn’t a sin, that is a part of what it means to live in this sin perverted world.

And some of the same things that caused his loneliness caused yours.

His 'transitions' Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:6, 'The time has come for my departure', he was experiencing a significant transition in life getting ready for his death waiting in prison. Life is full of transitions that are going to bring loneliness and some of them we expect.

We get transferred to a new place in the company. You go to a new school and you don't know anybody. You have just had a baby and your home all the time. Or maybe you have just said, 'Goodbye' to your last child and you're going through empty nest. There are going to be some things in life that you know are coming that are going to be times of loneliness.

But then there are going to be some things that you don't know are coming. It could be a divorce, and suddenly you are by yourself. It could be a sudden illness and now your life is dramatically changed by your new handicap. Or I don't know of an adjustment, which is harder to make, than losing your husband or wife.

A lot of us in this room are married and the great majority of us are going to say, 'Goodbye' to our mate or they will say, 'Goodbye' to us. And we will spend some time adjusting to life without them. Some of you are in the midst of a real painful transition right now and maybe just knowing that transitions are a part of life helps.

There is another cause of loneliness and its 'separation'. It comes when you are simply unable to be with the people you love. Your son has been sent overseas to an army base in Germany. Or your daughters all the way across the country with her babies because her husband has a new job. Or your children are off at college. Or maybe your dad has a job where he has to be away from the house 3 or 4 nights a week and you miss him, but he can't help it.

Noticed how many friends Paul missed, he said in 2 Timothy 4:10-12, 'Crescens is in Galatia, Titus is in Dalmatia, Tychicus is in Ephesus and Carpus is in Troas and Erastus is in Corinth and Trofanus, was sick, I had to leave him, he didn't want to leave me, he had too'. And Timothy's gone and that's why he's writing to him.

You see, separation can do a couple things to us. Notice, it can make us really 'appreciate other people', he said in 2 Timothy 4:9, 'Timothy, do you best to get here before winter, I want to see you so much.' We can almost take people for granted when we can see them every day, but suddenly they're gone, and we realize how much we miss them.

And also notice that separation can make us 'more forgiving of others'. Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:11, 'Would you get Mark and bring him with you.' Now there was a time when Paul didn't have much to do with Mark but when you're lonely, suddenly you're much more forgiving of the people you used to be around.

I wonder if I was to ask you to make a list of 5 people you wish you can see right away, how long it would take you to fill out that list? Probably not very long. Who would you love to see this week?

Separation is another part of life, it's a reality, that we don't have to like but we have to live with. You know that sometimes the people aren't even gone. You see, sometimes we are foolish, not to treasure the time we have right now with the people we love because we have no promise it will go on forever, and so separation can cause loneliness.

And the 3rd thing is 'opposition'. 'Alexander did me great harm,' Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:14+15 'He strongly opposed our message.' I believe if you stand for Christ, you are probably going to have to stand alone much of the time.

I remember when I was at school in the changing room, the 2 things the guys talked about the most was how drunk they got at the weekend and how far the girl on their date would let them go. People talk about dates, as if they were things to conquer rather than people to treasure. And when I hear that talk, I don't feel like I belong with those people.

I also had a job in a factory building furniture and I have never met cruder people in my life. And there was some people in that factory, that honestly enjoyed making me blush, they would think up, how crude and vulgar they could be, just because they laughed when I got embarrassed. And I remember thinking, I haven't got a single friend in this whole place. You're going to get hurt by people and it's hard.

Especially when that hurt is 'rejection' and that's the 4th thing that can cause loneliness.

Notice Paul said in **2 Timothy 4:10**, ‘**Demas has deserted me because he loved this world**’. It’s one thing when you get hurt by people that don’t love the Lord, but it is a totally different thing, when people you count on to be your friends desert you. Paul said in **2 Timothy 4:16**, ‘**At my first defence, no one supported me, but everyone deserted me.**’ See, Paul didn’t mind dying for Jesus but what he did mind was dying alone.

Do you know when loneliness is the most painful? It’s more painful when it’s created by a broken promise.

When that man had promised till death do us part, walks in one day and says, ‘I’m moving out’ and you find out, he’s got some girl at work half his age, he’s in love with. When they’d promised they would get up every morning and help you get the kids to worship, but they don’t. When your mum and dad said, ‘Yeh, we’ll be there, at the school activity, we’ll be there to watch you play’, but they are always so busy, they just never seem to make it.

I don’t think loneliness is ever harder than when it’s created by a broken promise. **Do you remember Job?** In poor health, he lost all his finances, lost his family and his friends came to mock him. He said in, **Job 19:19 ‘My intimate friends to test me, those I love have turned against me.’** Now that’s loneliness and loneliness can be so painful, that people will turn to anything to cope with it.

They will try alcohol, **why do you think pubs are so popular?** People don’t go to pubs to drink because they can do that at home. No, they go to pubs to find anybody to talk to. **Why do people become workaholics?** They are trying to fill up their life with something, because it hurts too much when they are by themselves and they realize there is nothing for them to look forward to. I believe, one of the reasons immorality is so rapid is that people are desperate to be connected to somebody, they’ll pay almost any price to do it.

Now loved ones, before you try anything else, try turning to God. For one thing, ‘**God understands loneliness**’. I honestly believe that there has never been a more intensely lonely moment, than when Jesus hung on the cross and was deserted by His friends. And so Jesus understands what it’s like to be absolutely alone, but not only does He understand, but ‘**He genuinely cares**’. The Bible says in **Psalms 34:18 ‘The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in Spirit.’** And you are never closer to God, than when you are hurting.

Paul was lonely, but I want you to know that, Paul turned to God, when he was lonely. And God gave him the strength to grow through the loneliness. I want you to notice **4** things that Paul did, and you can do these things when you’re in pain with loneliness.

1. Utilize your time. You see, doing nothing isn’t going to help, sitting around, throwing yourself a pity party, isn’t going to make the pain go away. I know feelings can influence our actions but I also know that our actions can influence our feelings. And you can decide to use that time to do things that are going to help with pain.

Notice Paul said in **2 Timothy 4:13**, ‘**I want you bring my cloak, I want you to bring my scrolls and especially I want you to bring my parchments.**’ Paul refused to feel sorry for himself. If he was going to die in prison, Rome was going to have to kill him, he wasn’t going to help them do the job. Now if you’re lonely, you ought to do what Paul did.

2. You ought to take care of yourself. He said in **2 Timothy 4:13**, ‘**Bring my cloak, I’m cold, I want to be healthy.**’ A lot of times when we start to feel sorry for ourselves, we let ourselves physically deteriorate and all that’s going to do is increase the depression. You need to take care of yourself, stay active, and be healthy.

But notice also, **3. You need mental stimulation.** He said **2 Timothy 4:13**, ‘**Bring me my scrolls, I want something to read, I want something to keep my mind occupied. I refuse to just sit here and draw myself in and become an emotional wreck**’. I’ll tell you what, if you’re struggling with loneliness, sitting there changing the channels for that junk on TV isn’t going to make you feel better. You need to find something, positive and healthy that’s going to challenge your mind and make you grow.

And notice he said, ‘**And especially bring my parchments**’. He wanted the Scriptures, what Satan is going to do when you are lonely, is keep you out of the word of God. **Now why does Paul want the Scriptures?**

He's not working on a new sermon series, loved ones, he's not going to get to preach any more sermons, he's about to be executed. He wants to spend time with God and you need to do the same thing.

Use your time well and 2nd thing is 'minimize the hurt'. I don't mean, you put on a silly smiley face and pretend that being lonely doesn't hurt. I mean, for you to deny the temptation to wallow in that pain and allow it just to fester and grow.

Notice what Paul said, he said in 2 Timothy 4:16, 'In my first defence nobody supported me, everybody deserted me'. But then he said, 'May it not be held against them.' Paul refused to let his loneliness, grow into bitterness and resentment at the people that created it. Now that is so important if you're going through loneliness right now. A lot of times, what we're tempted to do is pull inward, and get angry, and get upset at all the people we think are letting us down. But do you know what happens? When you turn into a resentful, bitter person, all you're doing is becoming more unpleasant and people don't want to be around you.

There used to be a cartoon in a local paper. And one day, one of the characters sees his friend in a big coat on. And his friend said, 'What is under your coat?' And so he opened it up and there were several sticks of dynamite. He said, 'Why do you have that under your coat?' He said, 'This guy is always walking up to me and jabbing me with his fingers and I'm tired of it.' He said, 'The next time he comes up and does that, he's going to blow his hand off.' He's not thinking, but do you know what? Neither are you.

If you believe that getting angry and bitter and resentful at people who have hurt you is going to help you, you're not hurting them, you're hurting yourself. Life is going to have its share of hurts, the issue is, how are you going to respond to it? Paul chose to focus on what he had, instead of what he lost. He said in 2 Timothy 4:17, 'They weren't there, but the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength.'

Did you know that a Christian can be lonely but it's absolutely impossible for a Christian to be alone? Because the 3rd thing Paul recognized was 'God's presence'. When you are hurt, it could be the hurt of loss, it could be the hurt of illness, it could be the hurt of betrayal, it could be the hurt of loneliness. When you're hurt, Satan wants to spread the lie, that 'God has abandoned you.'

Paul lost his friends, but he never lost his grip on the truth, Paul remembered what he wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:9 'God never abandons us.' The night before Jesus died He was with His disciples and He told them in John 16:32 'A time is coming, and has come, when you will all be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.'

And I don't believe for one moment that God turned His back on Jesus when He was on the cross. People say 'well God couldn't look at the sin that Jesus was carrying'. Loved ones God has been looking at and dealing with the sins of the world ever since Adam and Eve. And we know that Jesus was doing the will of the Father by going to the cross, why would the Father turn His back on Him for doing what the Father asked Him to do? Anyway, that's another topic for another day.

Hebrews 13:5 says, 'God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.' We live in a culture of depersonalization and most of the time when I make a phone call I'm just a number, I talk to a recorded voice, I'm a computer read out. But the Bible says, 'That's not how it is in heaven.' God is so intimately aware of me, according to Matthew 10:30, He can tell me right now how many hairs are on my head, and He knows you.

I heard a story about a little boy who practiced saying the Lord's Prayer and he said, 'Our Father who are in heaven, how did you know my name?' God is absolutely aware of everything you are going through, you are not alone, you may feel lonely, but you're not alone. You see, what would really help us when we hurt is to tune in to the comfort presence of God.

How do I do that? 1. You've got to desire it. The Bible says in Psalm 27:4 'The one thing I want most from God is living in his presence every day of my life.' We need to start the day by saying, 'God, what I really want today is, to be so aware of you today.'

You've got to desire it, and then you've got to dedicate time to it, dedicate time for seeking the presence of God. **Psalm 25:14** says, 'Friendship with God is reserved for those who reverence in him, with them alone, he shares the secrets of his promises.' God said in **Jeremiah 29:13**, 'You will find me, when you seek me, with all your heart.'

You see, no matter what else happens, it could always be you and Jesus. And what's going to happen is, when you start focusing on the Lord, instead of all your loneliness. Suddenly you're going to be able to look at other people in a healthy way too.

Because the 4th thing that is critical for growing through loneliness is 'emphasize other people's needs', that's Paul did. He said in **2 Timothy 4:17**, 'The Lord is by my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it.'

Even in prison Paul was focusing on how other people's needs could be met through the Gospel. I will tell you the single best way to heal a hurt, minister to somebody else's hurt with love. When you get hurt or when you are lonely, you could just block it all up inside or you can re-channel that love and pour it out on somebody else.

You see, there is a sense in which loneliness is a choice because there is a world of people needing to be loved. And what you can do when you are lonely is say, 'God, show me somebody that needs a hug today, and I'll go and give it to them.' I believe the cure for loneliness is receiving and releasing the love of Christ.

Do you know what some of you need to do today? You need to let Jesus love you, I'm not saying let Jesus save you because you are willing to do that, I'm saying, 'You need to let Jesus love you'. You see, people are still going to hurt you but you are going to be more aware of His promise in **Matthew 28:30** 'I am with you always.' I've had my share of hurt in my life but sadly I've done my share of hurting, but I can tell you for a fact, I've not been alone, because Jesus keeps His promise that 'He is with us always.'