

Loneliness is not a sin and we have no need to feel guilty about lonely feelings recurring even if we belong to God. What is senseless is the Christian either refusing to acknowledge he can be lonely or else giving in to the helpless lethargy that self-pity suggests. In Jesus we have a friend who can sympathize with our weaknesses.

Alan MacDonald, Tea for One (UCCF Booklets).

Notes



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Meeting With God Bible Reading Notes

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Week 46: Loneliness (An issue study)

To be lonely is not to be alone! You can be lonely in a football crowd, a packed underground station, a church, a family. An estimated four million people in Britain are lonely - both young and old. This is characteristic of modern society. The causes are many and the need for human contact desperate. The first step is to admit your feelings to someone - to God.

Whether you are lonely or not, remember you have been called to care for others. The lonely are much more able to understand the needs of those with similar feelings. And above all, the Lord Jesus, who experienced the ultimate in loneliness on the cross, understands and offers the solution through a variety of means.

Loneliness is the major problem of our day.

Malcolm Muggeridge

Day 1. Where's all that brotherly love?

1 Peter 4:7-11; Matthew 25:31-40

Lonely Christians? Yes, many of them. Are you the only one in your family, or at work? Do you feel like compromising just to feel one of the group? Have you listened to everyone's problems but no one will listen to yours? Have you ever been surrounded by chattering people in church but you feel isolated? Are there any practical ways by which you can overcome your own loneliness and that of others?

1. Read 1 Peter 4:7-11. What does Peter tell Christians to do to help others? Why should they? From the passage jot down practical ways in which we can be committed to the needs of others.
2. Read Matthew 25:31-40. Look out for the various areas of need that Jesus talks about meeting. 'Prayers may have feet' - how does the passage confirm this saying?

You will not find ... the Christian by staring in his eyes as if he were your mistress: better fight beside him ... pray with him.

C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Fontana, 1963)

Ask the Lord that you might be able to 'fight beside' and pray with the lonely.

Day 2. Down to earth with a bang

1 Kings 18 & 19

Elijah experienced God's greatness in a fantastic way (1 Kings 18) and then the rot set in with loneliness and despondency. Have you ever experienced a greatly inspiring time followed by dullness, loneliness, even defeat? Elijah experienced the lot but God had the answer.

1. Read about Elijah's experience of God in 1 Kings 18. Then turn to chapter 19. Note down Elijah's thoughts, especially 19:3-5, 10, 14. How would you summarize the ways in which God dealt with him?
2. Have you ever felt like Elijah did? How did God provide for him?
3. What comfort might this same God offer us? How often have you ignored the comfort which he offers because you are full of self-pity?

You can be only outward looking as you trust the Lord Jesus for strength. This has been promised (1 Peter 4:11). Hand your loneliness over to Jesus - you can't use it, but he can!

Day 3. I'm the odd one out!

John 5:2-9; Philippians 4:6-7; John 8:1-11; 1 John 1:9

Have you learnt to accept yourself? Do you feel unaccepted by others? Some are to be congratulated for being different - Christ-like for Christ! Others feel outcasts because of events in their lives - a relationship, drugs, a scar either physical or within ... On what basis does Jesus accept you?

1. What does the passage in John 8 say about Jesus' attitude to outcasts? Divide your sheet, and note down the main points on one side.
2. The attitudes of the scribes and Pharisees were opposed to those of Jesus. Write the corresponding contrasts on the other side.
3. Philippians 4:6-7 and 1 John 1:9 contain promises that assure the believer of Jesus' acceptance and comfort. What are these promises? Have you met the conditions given?

Ask yourself if you really believe Jesus accepts you, not because of, but in spite of, what you are, as he accepted the women. Ask him to make this a reality for you.

Memorize the Philippian verses you have read today.

Day 4. He'll have to speak first

Ephesians 4:1-7, 25-32; Romans 12:14-21

Most people aren't on speaking terms with God. Because of this the world is full of broken relationships. You may come from a broken home yourself, or have

experienced a break-up with a close friend. Bitterness and an unforgiving spirit often go with these, along with a sense of loneliness, and of being let down.

1. What do these verses have to say about bitterness and revenge? Note down the positive attitudes suggested.
2. A pattern for the way of forgiveness is shown. From where does the strength for this come?
3. Romans 12:21 'overcome evil with good' (NIV). What practical ways are there for fulfilling this?

Consider whether you need to put right any relationships in your own life. Tell Jesus and look expectantly for his working in your situation. Remember, however, that he has to prepare at least two hearts for reconciliation!

Day 5. All alone

Luke 10:25-37

People cause loneliness! They do it by forgetfulness - have you written home lately? By 'busyness' - does everyone have a life as full as yours? By climbing to the top - who've you stepped on this week? By grabbing their own pleasures - who have you used, or misused, recently?

1. Read Luke 10:25-37. Jot down the ways in which you love yourself. Taking verse 27, do you have as much love for others?
2. There was a centuries-old friction between Samaritans and Jews (the priest, levite and traveller were of this latter race). Contrast the behaviour of the priest and levite with that of the Samaritan. What does Jesus teach us about real caring?
3. Consider how observing the first commandment can be instrumental in helping us keep the one of secondary importance.

Resolve not to be a cause of loneliness, by positive prayer followed by action. Write that letter, make time to talk, encourage those around you, respect others.

Weekend

1. Read *Lonely But Never Alone* by Nicky Cruz (Pickering) - a very practical book both for the lonely and those who really want to help. Also worth reading are Roy Trevivian, *So You're Lonely* (Fount) and W. E. Hulme, *Creative Loneliness* (Marshall).
2. Put into practice what you have learnt. If you are lonely ask Jesus to give you the courage to seek out the right person to tell - perhaps a minister, a Christian known to you, someone in a local Christian bookshop. Whoever you are - invite someone for coffee or pop out to see someone who you know is often alone. And pray for sensitivity to the needs of others.