

# Loneliness

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12/16/07 AM  
Salem

2 Timothy 4:7-18

## INTRODUCTION:

- **Welcome!**
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This morning I would like us to focus our attentions on one of those human emotions that we all feel from time to time and something that some people struggle with regularly.

- We live in a society of acquaintances and we have very little time to develop deep meaningful relationships.
- We find that many people experience severe loneliness even though they are surrounded by people every day.
- We work with dozens if not hundreds of people in any given week and our busy schedules are filled with wall to wall events and our days are full of human contact.
- But despite all the contact that we have with so many people, we still rarely connect deeply with others.
- We have become a society with many clients, however, with very few colleagues.
- We have many acquaintances, but very few close friends.

There are many different reasons that individuals feel a sense of loneliness.

- This morning, I would like us to take a look at a passage that demonstrates that godly men in the Bible were sometimes lonely.
- Even the Apostle Paul, who was constantly visiting churches and writing letters to the brethren, reached a point in his life where he longed to be with people that he could connect with.
- This morning, I would like to examine a passage where Paul asks Timothy to give him support in a time of need... Specifically we will be taking a look at **2 Timothy 4**.

This passage was written during Paul's second Roman imprisonment not long before he was martyred.

- Many believe this passage to be the final words of Paul in the Bible.
- Some people even refer to it as Paul's "last will and testament."

Paul had been faithfully proclaiming the gospel from city to city.

- He was focused on getting the gospel message to as many souls as he could during his lifetime.
- The message he was delivering was controversial because for the Jews, the scribes and Pharisees, it meant that they would have to change their old habits.
- They would lose their positions of recognition and authority and they would have to live as simply Christians with all the members of the church as equals.
- Paul was not concerned with being "**politically correct**"; he was just concerned about being correct.

At this point in history Christians were at the pinnacle of persecutions and danger.

- Paul wrote this second letter to Timothy because he wanted to express the extreme importance of maintaining the faith and keeping the church of Jesus Christ going in the direction that Christ intended it to go.
- In **2 Timothy 1:14**, Paul spoke of "**sound words**" and gave a solemn charge to Timothy... He said, "**Guard...the treasure which has been entrusted to you.**" He was referring to the gospel message.
- Other parts of this letter encourages Timothy, Titus and the other Christians to be strong like an athlete competing to win, to be diligent in doing God's work without feeling ashamed, to "**flee from youthful lusts**", to be "**lovers of God**" rather than "**lovers of pleasure**", and preach the word knowing that "**All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching.**"
- As Paul's letter draws to an end in **chapter 4**, we begin to see that Paul is lonely and perhaps discouraged.
- Let us pick up right there by reading...

2 Timothy 4:7-16

- 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;  
 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.  
 9 Make every effort to come to me soon;  
 10 for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.  
 11 Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.  
 12 But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.  
 13 When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments.  
 14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.  
 15 Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching.  
 16 At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them.

When I think of the Apostle Paul, I generally think of someone with a very positive attitude and an upbeat type of personality.

- He was a “go getter” who seemed like he was invincible when it comes to persecutions and he could handle anything that was thrown at him.
- He was a high energy “CEO type” who was able to energize and motivate others by his attitude and actions.
- In this passage though, we get a glimpse of Paul that we don’t often see in scriptures.
- Paul shows some signs of sadness and loneliness.

The morning, I would like us to ask ourselves three different questions. The first question...

#### **I. IS ANYONE IMMUNE TO LONELINESS?**

Is there anyone who can live as a human that does not feel loneliness from time to time?

- Based on this passage we can see that even the “go getter” Paul felt loneliness.
- To summarize what we just read, one of Paul’s dear friends was straying from the faith
- Paul had sent one of the faithful brethren to Ephesus and others had chosen to leave him to go out to other cities.
- Paul says he was, “deserted” by Demas and with a subtle sadness he said, “Only Luke is with me.”
- He also said, “At my first defense no one supported me...”
- Throughout his two letters to Timothy, he also repeatedly requested for him and others to come be with him.

If I was in Paul’s shoes, I can imagine that I would have a lot of different thoughts going through my mind as I am sure I would be trying to grasp all of the events going on in my life.

- I would be feeling stress and perhaps despair about how things were going with the trial that I was going through.
- I would question the loyalty of my friends who seemingly no longer cared about my well being.
- I would feel unloved, rejected, and disappointed.
- Perhaps I would even feel anger, disgust, and grief over the apparent loss of support from those that were no longer with me to give me encouragement.

Every person in this room who has red blood and who breathes in and out all day has faced and will continue to face loneliness at different stages of your lives.

- We all have faced times when we have felt incomplete and have felt as though we needed somebody that we can confide in.
- In the Bible, we know that a number of God’s people that felt alone.
- In **Psalm 102**, David said that he was like a lonely bird on a housetop and he felt like God had lifted him up and cast him away.
- Other Bible heroes like Moses and Elijah and Jeremiah also showed signs of loneliness.
- Even Jesus Himself must have felt loneliness in Gethsemane.

I have heard that one out of every six people doesn't even have a single friend with whom he or she can talk about personal problems.

- Based on a highly trusted study done by sociologist Robert Weiss approximately 25% of Americans feel extremely lonely at some time during any given month.
- Loneliness soars during teenage years and reaches its highest peak in people between ages 18 and 25.
- We all go through phases of our lives where we just feel gloomy, unloved, rejected, and empty.

Many different great and important people of the Bible who had very encouraging and positive messages, would occasionally feel these very same emotions.

- LONELINESS CAN AFFECT ANYONE.

The second question that I would like us to ask ourselves is...

## II. WHY DO WE FEEL LONELINESS?

1. One of the biggest causes of loneliness is from a lack of companionship.

- Companionship can come in many different packages.
- It can include friendships with peers, family relationships, companionship between a man and a woman and so on.
- We all need a companion who we can share our deepest feelings with and someone who is willing to share the burdens of our hearts and to give us encouragement.

The strongest loneliness we feel is when someone that we love is not there for us when we need them.

Illustration: I have been to a number of funerals over the years and Kleenex boxes are always available for those who are shedding tears of grief at funerals.

- I have never been to a funeral where tears were not shed over the loss of a loved one.
- Next time you are at a funeral, look deeply into the eyes of the closest family members of the deceased and you will see a profound loneliness.

When someone close to us passes away, it leaves an empty space in our hearts.

- We grieve over this emptiness inside and we long to get back the closeness that we can no longer have.
- I can imagine that Paul was feeling as though his closeness with many of the brethren was gone; never to return again.
- He sent for Timothy and Mark, because he felt empty when his closest loved ones were no longer with him.

Paul felt abandoned... He faced this ordeal alone; and in this time of his greatest need he said, "no one supported me, but all deserted me."

- And regarding the first hearing that Paul had which preceded his formal trial, no one showed up.
- It is my understanding that Roman law would have permitted Paul to employ an advocate and call witnesses.
- But among all the Christians in Rome there was not one who would stand at his side in court to speak on his behalf.
- So imagine the disappointment of the great church planter when the church itself had let him down.

The need for companionship goes all the way back to the creation of the Earth when God first put Adam in the garden and God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone..." (Genesis 2)

Illustration: I recall the loneliness that I felt in college before I met Traci.

- I had a very loving family and I had some close friends that I could open up to share my thoughts with, but there was one type of companionship that was still missing.

I was reminded of the strength of companionship between a man and a woman when I conducted my 1<sup>st</sup> wedding.

- I looked into their eyes and it was obvious that they were no longer lonely.
- When they held hands, it was obvious the amount of love and support they had for each other.
- It was refreshing to see the fervor of emotion that was emanating from the two of them.
- When we have a lack of companionship, it is accompanied by loneliness.

## 2. A second thing that can cause us to feel lonely is when we are under opposition.

Not only was Paul feeling lack of companionship, but he was having to defend himself.

- Verse 15 of our text says that Paul's teachings were "vigorously opposed" by the coppersmith, Alexander.
- The previous verse said that Alexander did Paul "much harm."
- We don't know what Alexander did to Paul, but perhaps he was responsible for having Paul arrested.
- Imagine the inner struggle that Paul must have felt toward this very person who may have had him arrested and put on death row unjustly.

Paul faced his strongest recorded loneliness, when he was feeling as though he had been abandoned and when he was facing fierce opposition.

- These are some of the very reasons that loneliness is such a big problem in today's society.
- We face such ridiculing and opposition in the schools, in the business place, and even in the family.

Noah was in the same boat. (No pun intended) 😊

- He faced all kinds of opposition and ridicule for building the ark. They all thought he was crazy.
- Isaiah and Jeremiah faced loneliness because of the opposition that they came up against in trying to get the Israelites to be obedient to God.
- Today, we face opposition for some of the same reasons.
- People think we are crazy for going to three different church services every week.
- They don't understand how we can believe in something that we have never seen or have physical evidence of.
- We face opposition because of our belief and faith in God.
- Opposition is a contributing factor to loneliness

## 3. Another reason people feel loneliness is because of seclusion.

It is a part of our human nature to want to be included and accepted by others.

Most of us here are familiar with how teams are selected when it comes to children at play.

- Two team captains will be chosen and they will select the kids that they believe will be the best players for their team.
- For the last one chosen, it is humiliating to stand there waiting while everyone looks on and sees that you are perceived as the worst player.
- We all want to be one of the first ones chosen and it is hard being left out and feeling unwanted.

Genesis 4:4-5 says, "And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard."

- When God did not accept Cain's sacrifice, Cain felt left out and alone and this feeling made him angry enough to commit the first murder.
- Loneliness is the result when someone feels like they have been secluded.

At this point we have learned that loneliness can affect anyone and we have seen reasons why we feel loneliness.

- The third and probably most important question that I would like us to address is...

### III. HOW DO WE OVERCOME LONELINESS?

When Paul was feeling lonely, he made some requests of Timothy.

- Paul's first request was this, "Make every effort to come to me soon."
- His first line of defense for loneliness was to make an attempt to regain companionship with someone that he was close to.
- You see... Timothy was like a son to Paul.
- In the beginning of this letter Paul said, "I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy."
- And now, toward the end of the same letter, we see him saying, "Make every effort to come to me soon."
- If we look forward in our text, we see again in **verse 21** Paul repeats himself and pleads with Timothy to make every effort to come to him before the winter weather sets in.

When Paul was feeling lonely, he asked Timothy to come and be with him.

- Paul also asked Timothy to bring Mark with him.
- Paul desires companionship and emotional comfort from his Christian friends.
- During the 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey, you may recall that Mark had deserted Paul.
- Paul was upset with Mark for leaving the work and Barnabas stood up for Mark.
- But now we see that Paul had reconciled the earlier problem and now longed to be with Mark as well.

Perhaps if you are feeling lonely today, it is because you need to reconcile with someone in your life?

- If you desire companionship, perhaps you need to get reacquainted with someone who you haven't been close to for some time. Perhaps you need to forgive someone of past offenses.
- Paul forgave Mark for deserting him and now he longed for Mark to be with him for companionship.
- Paul also forgave those who deserted him in the second half of **verse 16**, he prayed, "**may it not be counted against them.**"
- **Ephesians 4:31-32** says, "**Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**"
- Paul forgave those who deserted him and he longed for companionship in his time of loneliness.

What about another type of loneliness Paul may have been feeling?

- Regarding the opposition that Paul was feeling, he turned it all over to God.
- After Paul warned Timothy about the harm that Alexander could do, he said, "**the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.**"
- Paul recognized that he cannot change those who opposed him, but perhaps God could; and if not, Alexander would have to face his own punishment for his own deeds.
- In **verse 10** we see that Demas apparently handled his opposition in a different way, and according to Paul, he "**loved this present world.**"
- When the opposition was high, Demas abandoned the faith in pursuit of worldly pleasures.
- When we are feeling opposition from the world, we should follow the example of Paul and we should do our best to turn it over to God in prayer.

Regarding fulfillment, there is really only one thing that could possibly bring Paul the kind of fulfillment that he was looking for in his time of loneliness.

- Did you notice some of the things that he requested of Timothy?
- He said to make every effort to come soon, to bring Mark, but he also made another request in **verse 13**.
- He said, "**When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments.**"
- The cloak was going to bring him a physical comfort knowing that winter was approaching.
- The "**books**" were possibly his personal journals about the works that he had been involved in.
- Take notice of the last thing that he asked for. He asked for several things, but this last request was obviously the most important to him. He wanted the cloak and the books, but he asked for "**especially the parchments.**"

These parchments must have provided for him the most important kind of fulfillment that he desired.

- These parchments of God's word were more valuable to Paul than any of his other possessions and during these troublesome times for Paul God's word was the most important thing that he requested.
- During the times that we feel loneliness and abandonment we can also find comfort in God's word.

If we look back to the Old Testament, God advised Joshua to hold fast to His word knowing that He would be with him... God told Joshua... "**I will be with you**", "**I will not fail you or forsake you.**"

- He also said regarding the book of the law, "**meditate on it day and night**"
- These are the things, which should fill our emptiness and loneliness!

- Paul did not turn to alcohol or drugs or earthly pleasures for comfort, he turned to his Christian friends and to God's word.
- By reading the next two verses of **2 Timothy 4**, it is obvious that he kept his focus on God.
- In **verses 17 & 18** he said, **"But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."**

Although we see that Paul had most of his dear friends leave him and he was apparently feeling sad and lonely, we notice that Paul didn't have any regret concerning the cause which he had been given.

- He began this passage by pointing out that he had put forth a very good fight for the spreading of the gospel and he remained faithful.
- Yes, he was left with only Luke and he longed for Timothy and Mark to join him, but when he wrote these words, there was no real sense of gloom in his letter.
- He knew that he had made the right decisions with his life and that he was right in God's eyes.
- Paul may have been deserted by all of his Christian friends, but he recognized that it is impossible for us to be alone!
- According to **Hebrews 13:5** God said, **"I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"** No matter how alone we might feel, it is comforting to know that God will always be there and He will never forsake us.

### **CONCLUSION/INVITATION:**

Paul recognized that there is a glorious future for those who have faithfully served God.

- He said, **"in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord...will award to me on that day..."**
- In heaven we will not feel lonely!
- All loneliness will cease for the faithful when the lord returns or when we pass from this life.
- On the flip side, we need to face the fact that loneliness will only be compounded 100 fold for the unfaithful, who will be separated from God and cast into eternal loneliness with Satan and the evildoers.

Let us take encouragement this morning though by thinking of **Psalm 68:6** which says, **"God makes a home for the lonely."**

- For Christians, we know that our home is in heaven with God and we will strive to keep our focus on this fact and strive to be pleasing to God in all respects.

If you are lonely, you should know that you don't have to continue in your loneliness.

- If you have never been baptized into Christ's body, you are still separated from Him and cannot be a part of His kingdom in heaven.
- There are so many people who are searching to fill the void in their lives and they are searching in all of the wrong places.
- They think they can find it in power, popularity, money or drugs & alcohol; but as Solomon said, it is all vanity of vanities.
- We can never know peace until we know the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ and are baptized for the forgiveness of our past offenses.

If you want to remove your feelings of loneliness, you can become a Christian today, I would like to urge you to come forward as we stand and sing...