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Scripture is taken from the Holy Bible,
New International Version
and The New Living Bible.

problems people face
Loneliness



Egerton Long is an ordained Baptist Minister who has served in churches in both USA and Australia. He and his wife Betty also served among the Indigenous people in Australia for over 25 years.

Other booklets are available in this series as well as Daily Devotional material.

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If you would like more information, please write to:

Christian Literature Ministry Inc.
PO Box 386
Round Corner 2158
NSW Australia
Email: info@clm.org.au
Website: www.clm.org.au

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HOW TO RECEIVE JESUS AS YOUR SAVIOUR

If God has been speaking to you as you have read this booklet and if you are willing now to take Jesus Christ as your Saviour, here is what you should do:

Confess – tell God in your own simple words that you are a sinner, needing a Saviour. (Read Romans 3:23)

Accept – tell God that you see Jesus Christ as your only Saviour and will accept Him now. (Read Romans 6:23)

Believe – that Jesus Christ has saved you because you asked Him to do so. (Read Romans 10:13)

If you have made this decision today then sign your name here and tell someone else what you have done. Join a church where you can hear God's Word preached and have fellowship with other believers.

I acknowledge myself to be a sinner in God's sight.

I accept Jesus Christ now as my Saviour.

I thank Him for saving me.

problems people face
Loneliness
and how to deal with it



PROBLEMS PEOPLE FACE - LONELINESS

A TV serviceman rang the doorbell of a highrise apartment. An elderly lady answered the door and invited him in. 'How much do you charge for a service call?' she asked. The service man named a figure that covered only the first twenty minutes. Picking up her purse the lady quickly opened it and handed him the exact amount he had mentioned.

But her next words startled him: 'There's nothing wrong with my TV. I just want you to stay here and talk to me for twenty minutes. I'm so lonely and I didn't know any other way to get someone to come here just to talk to me.'

Another lady was asked why she came regularly to a church group when she was not a member of that church. She replied: 'This is the only place where I hear my own name. When I go to the supermarket the check-out girl doesn't know me. I ride on the bus but no one uses my name. Wherever I go no one uses it. I come here just to hear my own name.'

Stories like these can be multiplied indefinitely. Why? One word – loneliness. Everyone knows that word. It has been said: 'Just to be a human being, is to know loneliness.' It is as old as the human race.

work on them. Certainly it will take considerable time to work through the list, but as you progress in one area you will find you are unconsciously improving in another.

Remember, loneliness can be conquered if you want to. Ask yourself: do you want to go on as you have been in the past? First, ask God for His help. Then determine you will actively do your part. And do not lose the lists you are working on. Keep them with your Bible. Reading your Bible will help you most of all. It is God's love-letter to you. Let it strengthen you, feed you and encourage you. Reading it can only draw you closer to Him.

Our continuing prayer and desire is that God will bless and help you today and every day to move from loneliness into friendship and happiness.

Please note: Several of the suggestions given above were taken from a booklet (now out of print) written by Dr. Norman Wright of USA. He has given his written permission for these to be used here. Our grateful thanks to him.

- ___ Have better feelings about myself
- ___ Communicate better with other people
- ___ Do more for others, without always expecting them to do something for me
- ___ Be willing to take a risk with people
- ___ Stop worrying about what people think of me
- ___ Be closer day by day to God and to Jesus Christ
- ___ Be more yielded daily to the Holy Spirit
- ___ Pray more consistently and more intelligently
- ___ Learn to handle any criticism better
- ___ Recognise the value of being alone at times, without being lonely and full of self-pity
- ___ Learn to affirm or commend other people more
- ___ Learn to accept compliments graciously
- ___ Be able to say 'no' at times without having strong guilt feelings

Take any three of the above which you have ticked and write them down on a sheet of paper. These are the first three to work on. For example, make better use of my time. Where and how do I waste time, fill in time or do nothing? What do I continually put off? Ask yourself how you can better plan your time. Write these kinds of questions down. Then start to make small changes in your use of time. Next, do the same with the other points you ticked. When you have faced up to those three and done something about them, pick another three and

Did Adam on their first night outside the Garden of Eden coin the phrase, "I feel so lonely?" Was that how it all began?

Loneliness is not just being alone. You can be extremely lonely in a crowded room or on a full aircraft. Married couples can be individually lonely, like parallel lines, running together but never meeting. Adolescents are particularly subject to loneliness, even though part of a large high school, or a church youth group. Students, away from home and familiar surroundings, can be desperately lonely.

Seniors and retirees can feel unwanted and rejected, however successful their previous occupations may have been. They may think of themselves as useless, forgotten by everyone, and wonder why they are still here. They might question if it is worthwhile getting out of bed each morning. Such thoughts are just another expression of loneliness. It is like a contagious disease which spreads all too quickly, or a chronic ailment plaguing us daily. It is symptomatic of today's pressured society.

In many churches, where fellowship is supposed to be number one, people can drop out and never be missed. The title of a book written by Mrs. Marion Jacobsen is both timely and challenging: 'Crowded pews and lonely people.' It describes the feelings and experiences of many who attend our churches but never feel accepted by the 'in' group.

So much of the conversation or greetings in any situation can be superficial. Generally speaking, it does not meet the need of lonely people. Often there is no continuing 'follow up.'

Single people, or survivors whose partners have passed away can know extreme loneliness. Busy people at the top of almost every profession will tell you that loneliness lives with them every day. It is the deepest pain of all. Some suicide notes are tragic: 'No one wants me.' That may not be true, but that is how that person has seen life. Loneliness is sitting by a telephone that never rings or turning away repeatedly from an empty mailbox.

THE AGE OF LONELINESS

Why is today sometimes called 'The age of loneliness' when there is more to entertain us and more sport to watch than ever before? There is far greater mobility on land, sea or in the air than any previous generation. The amount of reading material available, together with unsolicited advertising stuffed into our mailboxes, almost swamps us. We are besieged on every side by things designed to keep us busy or to make us feel fulfilled. Then why are so many people desperately lonely?

Are we being pessimistic to think that the incidence of loneliness could well increase in the years to come? Two contributing factors may be, firstly, what is called the 'singles explosion.' The percentage of singles in our population,

he was able to save the lives of those same brothers and even to forgive them. It can only be that God was so real to him that he never spent time in self-pity. What an example he is to us even today.

NOW – RECAP – WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ARE LONELY

1. Count on the presence of Christ always
2. Develop a spirit of thankfulness
3. Become involved in helping someone else
4. Determine to change your daily, weekly schedule so that you will be with other people more often

It is important for you to practise, beginning right now those actions or attitudes that will help you combat loneliness in your life. Do you want to? Are you prepared to ask God for His help in changing your life, your thinking, your habits, your outlook, in fact everything which has contributed to your loneliness? Remember – 'My God shall supply all your need.' Ask Him. Trust Him. Obey Him. Thank Him.

WHERE, WHAT AND HOW TO CHANGE

Please take time now to go through this list carefully, ticking each one which may apply to you. Some of these deal with loneliness, others with relationships. There are additional lines for other points which might occur to you.

Starting now I would like to:

___ Feel less insecure

___ Make better use of my time.

might eat together? You may be able to share a pot of tea or coffee with a neighbour. Rather than staying home and watching TV alone, find out about the shared activities you could join, a church group, a class, or a tennis or bowls club. Don't attempt too much all at once. Four small steps can be completed where attempting one giant step may lead to failure.

2. Mark the areas in which you would like to change. Then work on three of them
3. Write down three things you would expect from or in a close friend, if you had one. Now answer this question, are you that kind of a friend?
4. Write down three places where you could go to meet people. Plan to go to one of these during the next week. Then try the other two, soon!

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE BIBLE

Do you remember the story of Joseph in Genesis 37 and the succeeding chapters? Did anyone ever have more reason to feel lonely than Joseph? As a teenager he could have been lonely in his own home. At least ten of his brothers turned against him. He was forcibly separated from his loving father and even put in jail for something he didn't do. However, the Genesis record is clear. It repeatedly says 'the Lord was with Joseph'. Somehow he must have sensed the Lord's presence right through all the different and difficult experiences. Finally

including unmarried mothers, divorcees, career-oriented people and others is rising steadily whether we like it or not.

Secondly there is a very significant increase in life expectancy. The ageing population in most developed countries will see a very much higher percentage of older people, particularly widows, living alone. There is an urgent need to find an antidote to loneliness before this happens.

Loneliness is rather like physical pain which says to you: 'Something is wrong in your body and needs attention.' The presence of pain should never lead to self-pity. Neither should loneliness. It is too easy to develop continuous and increasing self-pity when you are lonely.

Pain, rejection, despair, melancholia are all very closely related to the word we are thinking about. Perhaps the worst loneliness of all is that experienced by those facing imminent death. Loved ones and friends visit them faithfully but finally they walk through the Valley alone. Only the companionship of the Good Shepherd can meet that need.

HOW CAN YOU DEFINE LONELINESS?

If we could define the term loneliness and discover its causes, we might move closer to alleviating the problem. What is it really? How do you define it? Loneliness is the felt absence of any meaningful relationship with another person. It is the lack or loss of any significant

friendship or companionship. It can come from or give rise to the mistaken thought that no one loves you. It has many causes and spares no one. Loneliness is the sense of alienation from familiar surroundings and faces. It is a feeling of uselessness or even lack of fulfillment.

Lack of personal support can bring it on. Isolation may contribute to it, although isolation by itself need not mean loneliness. However, not even ideal surroundings can prevent loneliness. Man was created for fellowship. He is unfulfilled without it, whether it is human fellowship or the deeper warmth of knowing God and His continuing presence. God Himself said 'it is not good for man to be alone.' We all long for companionship, for someone interested enough to become involved in our life and circumstances.

In the stories of the Bible, Moses felt it as he sat by a well in Midian after fleeing from Egypt. David knew it when he said: 'No man cares for my soul.' Elijah knew it when he sobbed: 'I only am left.' In the New Testament, Peter and Paul both faced it at various times. The moving words of Paul's final letter say so much: 'At my first defence, no-one came to my support, but everyone deserted me.' The loneliest cry ever to come from human lips was the cry of Jesus from the cross: 'My God, where are you? Why have you left me?' The Bible tells us that Christ suffered every possible human emotion while here on earth.

encouragement. You may wonder where to start or with whom. Think about the people you know. They may be at work, at church or even in your family. Why not give that person a phone call and say: 'I was just thinking about you and wondering how you are.' Then follow this statement with a question that requires more than a yes or no answer, such as: 'How has your week been?' or 'What have you been doing lately?' You should certainly try to contribute to the conversation but don't try to top every one of their stories with one of your own. You could build a network of friends by being interested in others.

WHAT CAN YOU CHANGE?

The practical questions at the end of this booklet may help here, but begin now to think of where you can go to meet possible friends. This may require a change in your daily schedule. Here are some suggestions that may help you. Face up to yourself, your schedule, your attitudes and be determined that your future will be different. No one answer will meet everyone's need. Most of all pray daily for God's help in all of this.

1. a. Take a piece of lined paper and set out your daily schedule hour by hour.
1. b. Mark the times when you are alone- especially the times when you feel lonely.
1. c. Now what alternatives can you think of? For example is it necessary to have your lunch on your own? Could you make other plans, such as asking a workmate if you

Do you have a home while many people are homeless? Thank God for your home. Do you have sufficient daily food while thousands starve to death every day? Why not thank God? Do you have adequate clothing? Many don't.

You will find it hard to be lonely if you learn to be truly thankful. It has been said that 'giving thanks means taking spiritual inventory of your blessings.' A hymn says 'Count your many blessings and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.' Try being thankful and see what it does to your loneliness.

Always be as specific in your thanks to God as you are in your asking – or should we call it complaining? Don't just hand God your 'spiritual shopping list' everyday without stopping to recognise what He did for you yesterday in answer to your prayers.

THINK ABOUT OTHERS

Next in importance to communicating with God is communicating with others. Again look at the practical suggestions on the final pages of this booklet. Consider also what the New Testament has to say regarding communication or fellowship with others. Are you expecting others to take an interest in you and your needs? Is it when no one else seems to have the time or interest to become involved with you, that you feel loneliest?

Why not become involved in someone else's life? In doing so, you may find mutual help and

WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU ARE LONELY?

Like pain, loneliness asks: 'Can't you do something about this feeling?' In many cases you can if you are willing to try. Some forms of loneliness may require that someone else takes action. For example, an elderly person in a nursing home could be greatly helped by a visitor taking time to see them. All of us should be more sensitive to the emotional needs of others. This is a very serious blind spot in many of us. If you are lonely, are you willing to try and do something yourself about your loneliness?

On the final pages of this booklet are some practical suggestions that you should take up if loneliness is a recurring problem for you. First, however, we will look at what could be called the 'spiritual answers' to loneliness. Needless to say drugs, drink or even abnormal activity are false cures for loneliness.

We need to recognise that loneliness can have at least one positive benefit. It can bring you closer to Jesus Christ. He could be preparing you for His plan for your life. God was doing that with Moses during the forty years in Midian. When you feel you have no meaningful relationship with anyone, remember, Jesus Christ can be and will always be with you. That's His promise. 'I will never, never fail you nor forsake you.' Hebrews 13:5. Read for yourself the words of Deuteronomy 31:8: 'The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you. He will never

leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged.’ Read again Isaiah 41:10. Mark it clearly in your Bible. Do it now and read it often. Believe these promises. Your faith can turn ‘potential truth’ into actual experiential truth.

The most obvious need when you are lonely is companionship. Jesus Christ can be your primary and closest companion and friend. I can testify to this. I spent 10 weeks in an isolation hospital with a glassed-in corridor between myself and the outside world. No visitors came into my room. I cannot tell you how close Jesus Christ became to me in those lonely weeks. I was allowed to keep only a small New Testament that a friend had sent me. Everything else was fumigated or destroyed. But with that little Testament and with Christ within me, alongside me, around me, I was never lonely. Remember, Christ is with us always. Nothing can separate you from Him or from His love.

‘BUT I NEED HUMAN FRIENDS TOO’

You remember the small boy who was told God would always be with him, even in the dark. His reply was: ‘Yes but I want someone with a face.’ We can identify with that and so does God. He made us for fellowship. Then what can we do about this need?

Remember the fantastic words of Philippians 4:19: ‘God will supply all your needs.’ Paul was apparently speaking about financial need in that section of the epistle but why not apply the verse more widely? When you are lonely Jesus Christ knows how you feel. He knows what human friendship can mean. He knows what the lack of it can do also. Think of His need of the three disciples in Gethsemane. Why not tell the Lord your need of a friend or friends?

Remember God is like a father to us, tender and sympathetic. (Psalm 103:13) Is step number one for you - to recognize that God is with you and then to ask Him to provide you a special friend or friends? He can do it. Always recognise too that to have a friend you must be one yourself.

May I add a word just here, however, to any lonely person who may be single and who may think God’s answer to this prayer will automatically be marriage. It may be but again it may not be. Paul can help us here. Read 1Corinthians 7:7 ‘We are not all the same. God gives some the gift of a husband or wife and to others He gives the gift of being able to stay happily unmarried.’ (Living Bible) Let Him decide your future for you.

TRY SAYING THANK YOU

Another way in which loneliness can affect us is to make us think we have nothing, or at least nothing worthwhile, when even the loneliest person can find many things to be thankful for.