

The Cure for Loneliness

Furthermore, if two lie down together to keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart (Ecclesiastes 4:11-12).

We are made for companionship and we feel it keenly when it is absent.

The refrain of the Beatle's hit song, *Eleanor Rigby* is:

All the lonely people.
Where do they all come from?
All the lonely people.
Where do they all belong?

Some of the most popular pop songs have had this lonely theme: *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry* by Hank Williams; *Only the Lonely* by Roy Orbison; *Lonely Man* by Elvis Presley and many others. Why are those songs so popular? Many people can relate to the lyrics.

Being alone and being lonely are two different things. You can be by yourself but not be lonely. You can be in a crowd, but the loneliness can be devastating.

A February 2014 article in *The Guardian* says that loneliness has found to be more deadly than obesity and is now being defined as a disease.

In a report called *Rewarding Social Connections Promote Successful Ageing* that Professor John Cacioppo presented in Chicago... the effect of satisfying relationships on the elderly was measured.

Cacioppo's team found that friendships helped older people develop their resilience and ability to bounce back after adversity, as well as an ability to gain strength from stress rather than be diminished by it.

Not surprisingly, there is no corresponding good news for those less well connected to other people. Loneliness has dramatic consequences on health. Feeling isolated from others can disrupt sleep, raise blood pressure, lower immunity, increase depression, lower overall subjective wellbeing and increase the stress hormone cortisol (at sustained high levels, cortisol gradually wears your body down).

Elderly people can often be so lonely that they will keep telemarketers on the phone just to have someone talk to them, but it is not just the elderly who are prone to loneliness.

Social media is not always beneficially social. Occasionally the harsh comments made through twitter, Facebook and other sources can cause great damage to the targeted person - often a young person.

God knows we need fellowship. He made us that way. *Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him"* (Genesis 2:18).

Loneliness is a malady that can strike even God's choicest servants. Elijah had performed great miracles in the name of the Lord, but then had a spell of depression when he thought he was alone. *Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men"* (1 Kings 18:22). With that declaration, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a demonstration. Each one would place a bull on an altar but put no fire under it. Elijah said, *"Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, He is God"* (1 Kings 18:24). After much pleading, the prophets of Baal were unable to get their gods to consume their offering. Elijah then poured water over the sacrifice and the wood and called upon the Lord who then consumed the sacrifice. The people saw, fell on their faces before God, and seized the prophets of Baal.

Even with the miracles that God had performed through Elijah's hand, Elijah continued to believe that he was alone. When Jezebel sought him out to kill him, he ran away, crying for God to take his life. When God confronted him, Elijah twice said, *"I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life"* (1 Kings 19:10,14).

God did two things to help Elijah understand he was not alone. He informed him of seven thousand in Israel who had not worshiped Baal. He sent Elijah to meet his own successor. Elisha became his servant and served the Lord with him. Cured of his disease of loneliness, when the Lord told Elijah He was going to take him to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah tried to leave Elisha behind. He wanted to go on alone. Elisha begged him to allow him to go with him, saying three times, *"I will not leave you!"*

What made the difference for Elijah? God became enough. He had believed in God and performed His miracles. Elijah wanted companionship. God gave him Elisha. In the time between his bout of depressing loneliness and his ride on the flaming chariot, Elijah realized that with God, he was never alone.

Jesus knew rejection, but He never gave in to the disease of loneliness because He knew that His Father was always with Him. *"Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me"* (John 16:32).

Alone, but not lonely, could describe many people I know. Like Anna, who was a widow eighty-four years and was so dedicated to God that He gave her the special gift of seeing the Christ Child, I know widows who spend most of their time in prayer. I have friends who are so sick they cannot do the things they would like to do, but give glory to God because they totally trust Him.

Jesus knew His disciples would be confused and lonely after His death. He told them it would be to their advantage that He went away because He would be sending His Holy Spirit to be with them always.

All the lonely people - where do they all come from?

They come from all ages and all nationalities. They come from every sex and every vocation. They come from every walk of life.

All the lonely people - where do they all belong?

In the loving presence of Jesus, who said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5b).