



LONELINESS

"I can't be alone," cried out the girl sitting cross-legged, looking pleadingly at me.

I rolled my eyes and sighed, wondering if I was finally getting a taste of how a parent deals with a petulant teenager. I was housing her at my place for a few weeks while her parents were out of town and found myself having many heart-to-heart talks with her. One of the subjects we spoke of was the one on loneliness, which was the reason she had this keen desire to become one of the more popular girls in school. She wanted attention from everyone, including her family. Talking to her did bring me back to a period of time when I was dropped out of many social groups because I wasn't cool anymore due to certain circumstances. I am sure anyone of us at any season of our lives would have experienced loneliness for one reason or another.

How did we deal with it?

First, we must be clear that being alone and being lonely are two different things. Being alone in a room does not equal to being lonely. One can be alone without being lonely, and one can be lonely in a crowded room. Loneliness is, therefore, a state of mind, an emotion brought on by feelings of separation from other human beings.

Causes of Loneliness¹

Loneliness doesn't develop overnight. It can be the result of a lifetime of influences that shape our personality or evolved after a major transition or trauma. Often we are unaware of the subtle forces that can slowly lead us into self-imposed isolation.

Some people tend to be loners because of circumstances in their childhood development. For example, growing up with an unaffectionate or overly critical parent may make one shy away from intimacy with others. Some people simply never learn to communicate well or get along with their peers. Others have overly aggressive or demanding personalities that make people withdraw out of intimidation. Conversely, people with low self-esteem often withdraw from

¹ Source taken from <http://www1.cbn.com/bible-teaching-loneliness>

social situations they believe will lead to rejection. Loneliness can become a lifestyle for the person who struggles with poorly developed interpersonal skills.

There are also many social factors that contribute to loneliness. We live in an age in which modern technology has made it easier to do things without other people and without leaving our homes. Television is the chief culprit that robs us of time with relatives and neighbors. For some, especially the elderly, the increased likelihood of becoming the victim of a crime keeps them from venturing out of their homes. Also, because our society is more mobile than in the past, families may relocate several times for career advancement or other reasons, which tends to discourage the development of deep friendships.

Loneliness can result from "situational factors," circumstances in life that increase the possibility of isolation. People who are unmarried, divorced or widowed are more likely to encounter loneliness simply because they are more likely to be alone. However, loneliness can also occur when a marriage relationship doesn't produce the closeness we expect. The student separated from home, the leader who must remain aloof from his subordinates, the individual with a disability or disease -- all face a greater chance of loneliness due to a situation in their lives.

Often loneliness brought on by developmental, social or situational factors leads to problems that only worsen loneliness. Alcoholism, drug abuse, family breakdown and other social ills are frequently rooted in loneliness and usually lead to greater alienation from meaningful human contact. The proliferation of gangs, religious cults and other deviant social groups can be attributed largely to people's need to belong somewhere and their failure to find acceptance in a traditional setting.

Whatever may be contributing to your loneliness, there is a way out. It begins with confronting a cause of loneliness that every human being must come to terms with -- the spiritual loneliness of being separated from God. Each of us has a need to connect with something larger than ourselves in order to fill the spiritual vacuum that exists within us all. The Bible is God's plan for developing the most important relationship in our lives.

The Walk

As I shared with the girl mentioned in the beginning of my article, a dynamic walk with God builds the foundations for building relationships with others. It is im-



portant for us not to be cut off from our immediate family, which is the group of brothers and sisters we have in church. They form a support group that functions just like our natural family. Christians who don't go to church or get involved in church activities cut themselves off from a rich source of companionship.

There are some specific things one can do to cope with loneliness and I provided a list. It is not comprehensive and is there just to provide some guidelines which hopefully, will help you progress out of the road of loneliness.

- Direct your thinking outward to others rather than thinking excessively about self.
- Determine that you can control your own attitudes and emotions. Ask God for His Spirit of love and joy (Galatians 5:22).
- Be friendly! Smile! Laugh! Positive actions and emotions are contagious and will encourage others to want to be around you (Proverbs 18:24).
- Go to church and engage in church activities and fellowship with others. Consider their needs and try to encourage and uplift them (Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 John 1:3).
- Adopt a pet from a shelter. A dog or cat will love you unconditionally as mine did!
- Volunteer your service to others. There are various volunteer programs at church or schools. Consider visiting a nursing home to cheer up the patients. You will soon have a different perspective about loneliness.
- Learn new things. Develop a new hobby. Expand your interests. Engage in conversations with others about current events and common interests.

- Use technology to be in touch. When used properly, the Internet can be an amazing blessing for communication and interaction with others. E-mail, Facebook and Twitter can be fun!
- Establish a circle of friends that you talk to on the phone. Include people who may also be in lonely situations. Make it your mission to help them. Ask your pastor or cell leaders about those who could use extra encouragement. Every day you can help brighten someone else's day.
- If you have deep loneliness and depression you can't pull out of, please seek help through counseling. Approach your cell leaders or pastors for help.

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