



Life Blueprints

Overcoming Loneliness

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I. Introduction

II Timothy 4:9-22 NASV

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. [17] But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth. [18] The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. [19] Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. [20] Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus. [21] Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren. [22] The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Loneliness is a growing problem in our society. A study by the American Council of Life Insurance reported that the loneliest group in America is college students. That's surprising! Next on the list are divorced people, welfare recipients, single mothers, rural students, housewives and the elderly. To point out how lonely people can be, Chuck Swindoll mentioned an ad in a Kansas newspaper. It read, "I will listen to you talk for 30 minutes without comment for \$5.00." Swindoll said, "Sounds like a hoax, doesn't it? But the person was serious. Did anyone call? You bet. It wasn't long before this individual was receiving ten to twenty calls a day. The pain of loneliness was so sharp that some were willing to try anything for a half hour of companionship." ¹

Isadora Duncan, the great ballet dancer who danced before the royalty of Europe and was considered one of the greatest ballet dancers of all time, said, "I have never been alone but that my heart did not ache, my eyes fill with tears, and my hands tremble for a peace and a joy that I never found." She went on to say that in the midst of millions of admirers, she was actually a very lonely woman.

I am sixty-five and I am lonely and have never found peace.

A beautiful young Hollywood star with apparently everything a woman could want, ended her life. In the brief note she left was an incredibly simple explanation—she was unbearably lonely.

It's been called the most devastating emotional problem of our time. Billy Graham has concluded that it is the one problem plaguing more people than any other. It's the probably reason that more than 500,000 attempt suicide and the reason AA says that many are driven to drink. I speak of loneliness.

Rick Warren asks, "Can you be wealthy and lonely?" Ask Howard Hughes. "Can you be popular and lonely?" Ask Elvis. "Can you be beautiful and lonely?" Ask Marilyn Monroe and the other movie stars who end their lives.

Loneliness may be knocking at your door. In a Roman prison cell it was certainly knocking on Paul's as he writes to young Timothy.

II. L – Loneliness Is...

That sense of separation or alienation from others. Feeling disconnected.
The feeling of isolation, even if you're in a crowd.
The feeling of emptiness.
The feeling of being unwanted, unneeded, unimportant.
The feeling that there is little to live for and that nobody really loves you or cares for you.
It's pain-turned inward.
An unfulfilled yearning for companionship.

A. Greek

Single or alone. Producing a sense of separation or alienation from others.

B. Webster's Dictionary:

The feeling of "standing apart from others of it's kind; isolated, unhappy at being alone; longing for friends, company." "It is strange to be known so universally and yet to be so lonely." ²

"Loneliness is the first thing which God's eye named, not good." ³

III. O – Open Door For Anyone

Loneliness is no respecter of persons. The door to loneliness is open to all people, all ages, from all walks of life. Being a Christian certainly doesn't insulate you from loneliness.

The Apostle Paul, the epitome of victorious, "Got it all together" Christian, was battling loneliness. He penned this letter, probably his last, from a dungeon. He writes to Timothy his young son in the ministry. He beckons him "**Come before winter**" [4:21] Come soon. He was lonely. He was facing death. If he didn't see him before winter he would never see him again on this side of heaven.

We all face those times of loneliness. It's real. You can be in a crowd of people and be lonely. You can be married and still be lonely. Be busy, active and still be lonely. You can have "things" and feel lonely.

Loneliness knocks on every door, even yours.

IV. N – Not The Same As Being Alone

Just because you are alone, doesn't mean you have to be lonely. Paul spent much time in solitude, alone before the Lord. Out of those times of being alone, came some of the books we have as part of God's Word. God uses those times of being alone with Him.

We all need those times of being alone, turning aside from the crowd to be quiet, to rest, to get a new perspective, to hear from God, to get our private world in order. Jesus did.

In your being alone, God may have you in a position to show you things, to teach you things, to speak to you in a way He never could if you were surrounded by people.

Paul spent three years in the Sand Seminary in solitude being prepared by God.

V. E – Examine The Causes Of Loneliness

Why do people get lonely? Why are so many plagued with this disease? Why are multitudes living on Lonely Street? Let's identify several causes:

1. Feelings of Separation

Paul faced this in his prison. He was separated from the people he loved. He desired to be with them, talk to them, hug them, look them in the eyes, and touch them. But they were miles away.

Separation from those you love leads to loneliness. Twenty percent of our society moves away from family and friends every year. Some people work away during the week and only come home on the weekend. No time to build relationships. People become numbers instead of names. IBM stands for I've Been Moved. It has left many lonely.

If you are separated from God, that is the greatest loneliness of all.

2. Fractured Relationships

Paul experienced this. He had been greatly disappointed in some people. They had hurt him.

II Timothy 4:10 NASV

for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

II Timothy 4:16 NASV

At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them.

Demas had turned his back on Paul and on the Lord. Relationships can be wonderful, but they can also break your heart and lead you to loneliness. It may be a fractured relationship with your husband or wife, a son or daughter, a dad or mom, a friend, even a brother or sister in Christ. "We don't talk." "We just don't get along." Some of the loneliest people I know are people who are living with a broken relationship. It may be a wrong relationship. Maybe an affair, a fatal attraction to someone.

3. Facing Opposition

Paul faced severe opposition.

II Timothy 4:14 NASV

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.

Alexander may have been the one who got Paul arrested and put on trial. The word “harm” means to oppose. He had attacked Paul spiritually.

Whenever you are under attack spiritually, it can be a lonely time. When you know someone is against you, doesn't like you, it leaves you lonely. You may even be facing opposition from a family member for your faith in Christ. Maybe you are facing opposition on the job for your Christian commitment, at school.

4. Feelings

Your emotions can cause loneliness. Paul was in a physical prison, but some are in an emotional prison because of their feelings. And they are lonely.

Feelings of rejection –maybe you have built a fence around you because you have been hurt or rejected. Feelings of guilt for something you have said or done. Feelings of confusion – not knowing which way to turn. Times of decisions can be lonely times. Feelings of bitterness, unforgiveness, or resentment toward someone. Feelings of selfishness – you have turned inward. Feeling sorry for yourself. Paul overcame these feelings. Many do not and they live in loneliness.

5. Facing Adverse Circumstances

Paul's situation was beyond his control. It was terribly lonely.

You may be facing a tough situation. The loss of a loved one, marriage problems, family hurts, a disease or an illness that has left you lonely, the loss of a job, financial pressures – all can cause loneliness. A divorce may have left you as a single parent and you're lonely.

6. Falling Out of God's Will

In sin...disobedience...

VI. L–LookUp

In that lonely prison cell, Paul kept looking up to Jesus. He had an upward gaze.

II Timothy 4:17-18 NASV

But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth. [18] The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Unsaved friend, look up! There is a wall of separation between you and God. As you look up to Jesus and place your faith in Him, the wall comes down. You then have a relationship with God. Jesus brings you and God together.

Christian, look up! He has promised to never leave you or forsake you. Jesus is Emmanuel – God With Us, God With You. Get your eyes on Jesus.

VII. I – Inward Evaluation

Paul took inventory. In II Timothy 4:11 he tells Timothy to “pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.”

Remember Paul had been angry with Mark for leaving the ministry specifically leaving Paul in a lurch on his world mission journey. But Paul forgave him and restored the broken relationship.

Look inward and ask some probing questions. “Is there unconfessed sin in my life?” “Is there bitterness or unforgiveness?” “Is there a broken relationship that needs to be restored?”

Take inventory and then confess any sin to God. Go to those you have wronged or have wronged you.

VIII. N – Now

There are some things you can do now. Let me mention three of them:

1. Look For

Look for opportunities to make the best and most out of a bad situation. Paul looked for ways to be used of God in spite of his circumstances. He mentions parchments. This may also be a reference to writing materials.

Paul would use his pen to write and encourage his friends and the churches. Out of a prison cell came Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Look for ways to be used of God. It may be writing someone to encourage him or expressing your love and appreciation.

Look for the good. Look for how God could use your situation to advance the cause of Christ.

2. Look Around

People all around you are hurting. Start encouraging them. Get in a church and start giving your time, talents and treasures. Be fed the Word of God consistently. Get in a Sunday School class. Start belonging somewhere.

3. Look Forward

What a wonderful future!

II Timothy 4:18 NASV

The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

You won't always be in the circumstances you are in now. Things will change. Just cooperate with the Lord. Victory awaits you. A new day is coming. The night will pass. At the end, there's a new beginning.

IX. E – Evangelize The Lost

Paul's focus was still on reaching people for Christ.

II Timothy 4:12 NASV

But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.

II Timothy 4:17 NASV

But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth.

Paul kept preaching the gospel. He kept the main thing the main thing. He kept an outward look on those who were without Christ. There is a waiting world out there.

“I am never lonely when I am sharing Him with others. There is a great exhilaration in talking to others about Christ. This is something we can all do.”⁴

Get the lost on your heart. Share your testimony. Joy will replace your loneliness.

How About Some M&Ms?

In March 1984 I was invited to speak at an InterVarsity Christian Fellowship conference in Ft. Lauderdale. It was spring break for most colleges, which meant that tens of thousands of students from all over the United States converged on the Florida beaches. The InterVarsity students came to Ft. Lauderdale for a special purpose: to share Jesus Christ with as many vacationing students as possible. These would-be witnesses were eager to share their faith, but many of them lacked a witnessing plan. My assignment was to equip them with several effective methods for sharing their faith.

The method that really became popular was the M&Ms approach. I encouraged these Christian students to buy some M&Ms candies and share them with strangers on the beach as an introduction. Once a conversation was started, the witnesses could use the candies to introduce their new friends to Jesus Christ – the man, the mediator and God method and means for salvation.⁵

The IV students swarmed into the local candy stores and bought out their supplies of M&Ms. Then they hit the beaches in teams of two and found it extremely easy and natural to offer M&Ms as a means of sharing the good news. The M&Ms presentation of the gospel always had “sweet” results!

SUBSTITUTES MUST BE AVOIDED

Beware of substitutes, the counterfeit cures for this disease.

Some people turn to drugs and alcohol as a quick fix to help them make it through another day. But peace doesn't come in a pill, a bag, or a bottle.

Some turn to an affair because they think it will cure their loneliness, but it doesn't. Still others may turn to more activity, getting busier, doing more, but it leaves you physically and emotionally drained and doesn't cure the loneliness.

Some see getting married as the cure, but marriage, as wonderful as it is, is not the cure. The cure can't be found on prime time soap operas, CD's or the Internet Chatterbox.

Suicide is seen by many as the easiest way out. Some believe it's easier to die than to live and face one more day. But suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. (Dads and Girls)

X. S – Scripture

Paul looks to God’s word to find strength and encouragement. Stand on His promises.

II Timothy 4:13 NASV

When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments.

The books and parchments were probably copies of the Old Testament. Paul wanted to read and study God’s Word (Psalms and Proverbs).

Billy Graham said: “I am never lonely when I am reading the Bible.”

I’ve seen the lightning flashing, I’ve heard the Thunder roll, I’ve felt sin’s breakers dashing, Trying to conquer my soul. I’ve heard the voice of Jesus, Telling me still to fight on, He promised never to save me,

Never to leave me alone. No, never alone. No, never alone. He promised never to leave me, Never to leave me alone. No, never alone. No, never alone. He promised never to leave me, Never to leave me alone.⁶

XI. Endnotes

1 **Quote:** Zuck (p. 232)

2 **Quote:** Albert Einstein

3 **Quote:** John Milton

4 **Quote:** Billy Graham

5 **Quote:** "Won by One" Dr. Ron Rand

6 **Quote:** "No Never Alone" – Hymn