

Loneliness

Introduction

We live in a world with more than six billion people! With so many people, it's amazing that anyone would ever feel alone. But even though we are surrounded by all these people, many times our suffering and pain go unnoticed. We often feel isolated, cut off from the concern and compassions we so desperately need.

Reflect: Why do I sometimes feel so alone, like my life doesn't really matter to anyone else? How do I overcome my loneliness? What can I do to feel more connected with others?

At some point in our lives, all of us have been by ourselves. Some of us have experienced a few empty hours; others have spent lots of time alone. For some people these lonely times do not create a problem, but many see them as a serious threat. They see being alone as something harmful, an obstacle that blocks our their way to happiness. This attitude can cause a person to fear being alone, and to then find it difficult to adapt to loneliness.

This booklet will help you see both sides of the coin — to overcome the destructive forms of loneliness and to understand the benefits of having some time to yourself, some refreshing solitude. Loneliness does not have to destroy your ability to find joy and happiness.

While we cannot always avoid crises such as loneliness in our lives, they can become opportunities to learn and grow. God our Creator loves us and gives us the opportunity to live in peace with Him. God gives us the strength to use our lives as a benefit to others and to find solutions to the challenges we face. We can do this because we have the best support possible — Jesus Christ says: *"I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it abundantly."*

What is Loneliness?

Loneliness is living under the impression that you don't mean anything of significance to anyone else, and it is common to everyone. It's feeling isolated, even though there are others around you. Loneliness can be an overpowering emotion, like the way you feel after the death of someone close to you. However, loneliness does not result in the same state of mind every time it strikes, because many things can cause it.

In the past, people were born, lived, and died in the same city; and many times, even in the same house. Families were large and it wasn't at all strange to find three generations living under the same roof. There was seldom any time for loneliness.

Now, however, this is rare. Children leave their parents to go to university, or work in another city, or sometimes even in another country. This can cause loneliness for not only themselves, but also for their parents. The increasing number of divorces and separations also cause many to be left alone.

The phenomenon of loneliness can often be better seen in large cities. Even though surrounded by millions, many find it difficult to establish relationships with people they don't know. Distrust and suspicion of others makes it difficult for them to communicate. Anyone and everyone — poor, middle class, and rich can experience loneliness and suffer from it if he or she does not learn to adapt to the situation.

Two Sides of the Coin

Let's take a look at some causes of loneliness and explore how to adapt to those circumstances.

Unhappy experiences: Those who have experienced loneliness after they have lived unhappily for many years in the company of others have quite possibly decided that they will never again live with anyone else and will live the rest of their days alone. One should not make the decision to be alone so quickly. Just because the experience you've had was terrible, it does not mean that the entire world is that way.

Self-punishment: Loneliness should not be a punishment. If a mistake has been made, consider it an experience and do not repeat it. You don't have to take it as a sign of incompetence or let the fear of failure stop you from trying again.

Guilt feelings: Using loneliness as a compensation for guilt makes it very difficult to adapt. When things do not come out right, or don't work the way we'd like them to, our guilt leads to placing the blame onto someone else. Then we isolate ourselves from those we blame, adding intense loneliness to our burden of guilt.

Everyday problems: Experiencing economic, work, and health problems can make the feelings of isolation and abandonment more severe.

Nostalgia: It is almost inevitable that those who live alone may have feelings of nostalgia on days like Christmas or a birthday. They can remember so vividly the good times they had with other people, family, and friends. This is normal because memories play a part in our everyday lives, in good ways and in bad.

Low self-esteem: When we think negatively about ourselves, we begin to lose self-esteem. We get discouraged when we see the huge difference between the person we are and the person we want to be. The difficulty in bringing these two images together, in achieving this peace within us, is one of the most frequent causes of loneliness.

Pride: Often our pride does not allow us to realize that we are the cause of our loneliness and that we can make the changes necessary to bring peace and happiness into our lives. We would rather pretend that we are content, silently suffering the pain and heartache that loneliness brings.

Real-Life Cases

The following situations demonstrate how different people face loneliness. Notice that some people deal with it in destructive and non-creative ways. But notice, too, that others use it as an opportunity to learn and develop new relationship skills, even if they are still alone.

PETER: Twenty-seven-year-old Peter is an office clerk with a good educational background. He's been working many years in a position he finds fulfilling. He has also been dating Marina, who is a law student, for two years. Marina works in the office next to his, but they only went out on Fridays. When Peter was by himself, he often got depressed and felt that he couldn't overcome the negative thoughts he was having, sometimes even thinking of committing suicide.

Today Peter says, "I had no idea who I was, and that made me insecure and scared. If I had a clear idea of what I wanted to do, or somebody had been there to help me figure it out, and if I had the courage to try it, it would have been a big step toward overcoming this loneliness. My thinking changed when I did an evaluation of my positive characteristics, trying to emphasize them more. I paid less attention to my shortcomings in life, and began to look for ways to overcome them."

Reflect: Do I really know myself? Do I know what my strong points are and where I need to improve? Do I draw on my strong points in my relationships with others?

JOHN: A 64-year-old man, John lives on a farm. He never considered getting married, although he has had different girlfriends. Today, as he sits alone, he asks, "Do I deserve to live life alone and old? No one cares about me. I don't mean a thing to anyone. I think even God has forgotten about me!"

God is here to listen to our voices, even if they are just a whisper. God grants us the privilege to communicate with Him, even about the most intimate things!

God established a perfect and everlasting friendship with us through Jesus Christ. Because of Him, we are sure of the love God has for us. Through Jesus we are able to have peace and live in harmony with others, the world, God, and ourselves.

ANNA: A young secretary, Anna is very personable and dresses well. She doesn't have any close family, nor does she have any special friends. She has always been very preoccupied with her looks. Now she is having problems with her new boss. She's been at home for a week by herself because of a cold and she admits: "I can't stand this loneliness."

Until now, Anna has always considered herself someone who's just not "with it." Anna is distressed about how she sees herself and, because of this, she looks for things that will get her noticed, like the clothes she wears, a good personality, and money — everything the media says will get you attention.

Anna is important to God as God demonstrated this by sacrificing his own only son for her. Anna is important to God no matter how she looks.

Reflect: Do I have the courage to accept myself as I am, even with my limitations?

Recognizing who you are and more importantly, whose you are is helpful. God knows you perfectly and is here to help you. He wants to give you the true peace and joy of belonging to Him.

JAKE: A mechanic, Jake lives alone with the solemn memory of his wife, who died shortly after they were married.

Jake was not nice to his wife. Now he feels remorse and deep guilt for what he has done. Because of the guilt, Jake finds it difficult to accept forgiveness and friendship with others. There is an awful emptiness in his heart that is unbearable.

Reflect: Am I honest, sincere, and open about my feelings? Can I share my shortcomings with others, asking for their forgiveness? Can I share them also with God? How many times do I hide from others, and from life itself, afraid that someone will learn who I really am?

God sees and knows what we are going through. God forgives us through the sacrificial death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ. God wants us to see what life can truly be and wants us to seek and live in his mercy, compassion and comfort.

EDWARD: Edward, 38 years old and a public accountant, drinks too much. Ever since he was a young man, he has grown accustomed to celebrating everything — victories to losses — with alcohol. Little by little, he has fallen into alcoholism. He no longer has friends. He feels alone, and in order to fill that void, he drowns his sorrows in alcohol. Edward needs to find someone who will help him.

Reflect: If you have problems with alcohol, drugs, or another hard habit to break, can you admit that you are powerless to solve those problems on your own? Can you honestly ask, "Do I have the courage to ask for help?" and then pray for God to provide you with that help?

BETH: Just a teenager, Beth is 16 years old and finishing up high school. Lately she has begun to feel like she is just not complete, as if something were missing. She has no siblings, and her father abandoned Beth and her mom years ago. She is scared to be alone, and the hours seem eternal. When she is with her mother, they rarely talk about important things. Her mother works hard in order to pay for Beth's studies, and she makes all the decisions about Beth's life. In order to conquer her loneliness, Beth has become very dependent and passive. It's as if she's waiting for someone to live her life for her, so she won't have to face any more pain.

Reflect: Do you find yourself assuming that the future will be an instant replay of the past's hardships and heartaches? Can you look forward to each new day as a gift from God, full of promises and opportunities? Are you courageously exploring the gifts God has given you, and using those gifts to live a more fulfilling life?

God certainly doesn't want us to be afraid of the future! As we rely on Him, and on His love for us, we can find the courage to take charge of life and to move away from our loneliness. "*Perfect love casts out fear,*" He says. This is the kind of perfect love that God showed for us when He sent His Son to live among us, to die for our sins, to be our Saviour and Lord.

CHARLES: Charles is a 10-year-old boy in grade 5, but it's not going very well for him. Both of his parents work all day, and, except for when Charles is in school, he is alone. He often feels bored, abandoned, and frustrated. He has begun to smoke marijuana that one of the older boys insisted he try. Sadly, at such a young age, Charles has picked a very dangerous way to fill the emptiness in his life.

Reflect: Are my friends people with whom I should spend my time? What is a true friend?

God again shows His love for us by offering the concern and companionship of His people, the Christian Church. Friendship within a community of faith can relieve our loneliness far better than drugs, alcohol, pornography, or any of the other temptations we might fall into.

ANTHONY: Although very famous as a talented singer, Anthony has no real friends, only "fans." He often feels alone, although in the world's eyes he has it all. He longs to have a true friend, someone with whom he can share his joys and sorrows. Anthony would rather look for triumph, but realises that he ends up with failure. Anthony struggles to develop better relationships with the people around him.

Reflect: Has it ever occurred to you that Christ may want to be that friend you need? Do you want to be popular so badly that you put this above all things, including building solid friendships? What are your priorities in life? Have you left a place for Jesus and His love?

A NEIGHBOR: A man was walking down the road one day when some robbers came and attacked him. They stole his clothes, beat him, and left, leaving the man for dead. Later on, two men were walking down the same road and they saw the badly beaten man; however, they walked away. Perhaps these two men were thinking of various reasons and excuses as to why they couldn't help this injured man. However, a man from Samaria who happened to be walking down that same road, saw the injured man, had compassion for him, helped him, and tended to the healing of his wounds.

This is one of the stories told in the Bible to demonstrate the unconditional love of Christ. We are all familiar with situations in which others need our help. Perhaps our neighbours are suffering because of a natural disaster, accident, or some other problem. During these times in our neighbour's lives, feelings of loneliness and abandonment reign. But we can be sure of one thing — Jesus Christ is by our side during our most difficult times, and we can share that love with those who need us.

Reflect: Who is your neighbour? How can you show unconditional love to him or her? Do you trust God with your life? Are you willing to let Him help you?

How Loneliness Can Help Us Grow

As we learn to accept the realities of life and begin to convert these situations into opportunities for personal growth, the anxiety that causes loneliness may be reduced.

This means admitting that life can sometimes be hard, but that we can face it without bitterness or resentment.

We can be free from much of our loneliness when we learn to take life just the way it is and respond to it without complaining, without putting the blame on God or others. Including realising that;

- We can't always have everything we want.
- Life doesn't always travel the road we want it to.
- We are not always able to love the way we'd like to love or be loved the way we'd like to be loved.
- Complete peace cannot be found within ourselves.
- Our own weaknesses and limitations often stand in the way of the type of fulfilment we'd choose.

When we learn to accept ourselves as having limitations, admit our wrongs, ask for forgiveness and peace from God, and trust in His unconditional love, much of our anxiety will subside. For in the middle of our weakness, God shows His power. He strengthens us more than our human understanding will ever know.

Trusting our lives to His care brings peace and encourages hope.

Reflect: Can I accept myself the way I am? Can I admit that I am not what I want to be? Do I trust God to guide me through life?

The more we hide from our thoughts and emotions, the less we know about ourselves. When we try to live our lives according to a set of unrealistic expectations, we will be less prepared to work on our shortcomings. It helps to simply slow down and reflect. God your Creator gave life so that you can make the best of it and feel useful and fulfilled.

AMANDA: Amanda is 32 years old, single, and has no commitments. Amanda likes to write but is working several jobs, which prevents her from finishing the book she has started. She likes to sit by herself and dream about the books she would like to write. She enjoys being by herself, mentally planning every detail of what she is going to do. Even though she faces many obstacles, she does not get frustrated. She has made this bible verse her words to live by: "*I can do all through God who strengthens me.*"

Reflect: Who holds me up when I am having a difficult time? Who can I turn to who will set me free from my loneliness? What is holding me back from admitting that I need a friend like Jesus Christ?

CECILIA: As a teacher, Cecilia leads a very active life. She teaches year 4 and has 30 students. Her weekdays revolve around preparing for classes, grading homework, and keeping up with her housework. She looks forward to Friday after school to be by herself and to read whatever she wants. She enjoys her solitude with a favourite book in her hand. She has established her priorities in life and knows that there is a time for everything.

Her motto for life also comes from the bible:

To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven:

*A time to be born and a time to die,
A time to plant and a time to pluck up what has been planted.
A time to kill and a time to heal,
A time to break down and a time to build up. A time to cry and a time to laugh,
A time to mourn and a time to dance.
A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together,
A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.
A time to get and a time to lose,
A time to keep and a time to cast away.
A time to tear apart and a time to sew,
A time to keep silent and a time to speak. A time for love and a time for hate,
A time for war and a time for peace.*

JULIE: Julie loves to be alone, especially after a busy day with her three kids. She likes to read and reflect upon what she learns from her children. She enjoys listening to music because it makes her optimistic, rejuvenated, and happy. Julie developed a "plan of action" that helped prioritize the housework she has to do, in order to have some time to herself during the day. She has also begun to write letters to relatives and friends.

Reflect: How do I treat myself? Do I look forward to spending time by myself? Do I expect too much, driving myself to accomplish too much? How would God want me to spend my time?

God is the author of love. He loves us deeply and wants us to find true joy in our lives. He sent His Son to die on the cross for us, to forgive us so that we could have a model of what real love is. As we base our lives on that love, the abundant life He has prepared for us is poured out upon us.

GEORGE: He was in jail for one year for drug trafficking. Although this embarrassed him, George learned to reflect back upon his life. He examined his decisions and realized that he had often felt irritated, at fault, frustrated, and envious. He came to the conclusion that he had felt envious of other people; that he, too, wanted to be successful and popular. He then realized that he also needed a new "plan of attack" in order to reach his goals. He started to study and plans to graduate.

Reflect: What is really important to me? If I only had one year of life left, what would I like to do?

JESUS CHRIST: The only Son of God, He lived on this earth until He was 33 years old. His mission was to save the world. He was betrayed, humiliated, judged, crucified, and abandoned. He died — ridiculed, hung on a cross, and alone.

Jesus Christ often felt alone. He was rejected many times by the leaders of His time. People did not understand Him, even His disciples, His closest companions. He felt this loneliness in the cruellest way because He knew He was going to die on the cross. A few days before His crucifixion, when the multitudes had abandoned Him, He asked His disciples, "Do you want to leave Me, too?" The night He was arrested, His friends

deserted Him. As He suffered, He cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He died alone — carrying out the mission His Father had given Him.

The death of Christ is the key to triumph over loneliness. Jesus Christ told His disciples: "The hour is coming, when you will all scatter your own ways and you will leave Me alone; I will not be alone because the Father is with Me."

Knowing that He was doing God the Father's will, Christ trusted Him completely. Jesus said, "I am with you always, until the end of the world," promising that we can trust Him in the same way He trusted His Father.

When loneliness becomes too hard to bear, remember that God is always beside us, helping us to live our lives with optimism and hope. We are not alone!

Personally Overcoming Loneliness

Jesus Christ took advantage of His time alone, using it to meditate and pray. We can see how He did this before His death, in the Garden of Gethsemane, as well as in various other situations. Being alone is sometimes hard.

By the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, God the Father demonstrated that you matter very much to Him. He is concerned about what happens in your life and wants to give you peace, joy and hope.

God's presence in our lives makes it possible for us to be alone without feeling abandoned. We can use our times of solitude to communicate with God in prayer and to read his promises in the Bible. We can reach out in love to others, sharing with them the strength and comfort God gives to us.

Being alone can sometimes be frightening. It's difficult to make our own decisions, to be responsible for finding friends, and establishing close relationships with our neighbours. It's challenging to approach people, asking them to accept us as we are. It's threatening to offer love to others, knowing that they will sometimes refuse what we offer. But God keeps His promises. He is always with us; He is always there to support and encourage us.

Our times of being alone can be opportunities to learn more about ourselves and to begin to accept ourselves as God made us. Our times of silent reflection can teach us so much about God's love, enable us to see the light that Jesus Christ brings into our lives. We can feel, appreciate, and celebrate how God goes with us in every circumstance. He is better than a best friend.

Conclusion

Through the situations outlined in this booklet, we have seen how some people react to loneliness. We've learned to see it as "two sides of a coin." Many see loneliness as something that makes them suffer, something that causes pain. Others have learned

to appreciate and even enjoy it. What's the difference? We have two paths — one is to live our lives in loneliness, frustrated and empty; the other is one of happiness, optimism, and the power to trust in God, who gives us salvation and eternal life.

Jesus Christ affirms that, *"I am calling at your door; if someone hears My voice and opens the door, I will enter the house and we will eat together."*

We find true contentment when we know God as the reason for our lives, so that we are able to understand who we really are. God created us so that we could have a very special relationship with Him. Thanks to His love for us, He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, who died and rose again to re-establish our relationship with Him. Trust in the companionship Jesus Christ offers! His words give us true cause for celebration: *"For I will be with you always, until the end of time!"* Share your life with Him, communicate with Him in prayer, and welcome Him into your times of solitude. It makes all the difference in the world!

Bible Verses

1. John 10:10
2. Romans 12:2
3. Proverbs 22:24-25
4. Luke 10:34
5. Philippians 4:13
6. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
7. John 6:67
8. Matthew 27:45-46
9. John 16:32
10. Matthew 28:20
11. Philippians 4:6-7
12. Revelation 3:20

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