

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, December 17, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

THE PROBLEM WITH CHRISTMAS

“Dealing with Loneliness”

2 Timothy 4:9-22 & Selected Scripture

IT'S THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME

It's the most wonderful time of the year
With the kids jingle-belling, and everyone telling you be of good cheer
It's the most wonderful time of the year.

It's the hap-happiest season of all, with those holiday greetings
And gay happy meetings, when friends come to call
It's the hap-happiest season of all

There'll be parties for hosting, marshmallows for roasting, and caroling out in the snow
There'll be scary ghost stories, and tales of the glories of Christmases long, long ago

It's the most wonderful time of the year
There be much mistletoe-ing, and hearts will be glowing when loved ones are near
It's the most wonderful time of the year...

It's a great song? Isn't it? But for many people the words of that song should be changed to “It's the Most Lonely Time of the Year.” (READ: Christianity Today Article, “The Loneliest Time of the Year.”)

Loneliness has been called “the most desolate word in the human language.” Under the heavy weight it hangs on the heart, anguish reaches its deepest levels. Strangely, activity and a faster pace doesn't help much to lighten that weight. Neither does travel. Not the hustle and bustle of Christmas... getting busy at Christmas... having lots of people around... or traveling to be with family. Loneliness can strike and stick even in a crowd, and at Christmastime. A lonely soul is not comforted by new surroundings. Many a person in our rapid-fire, fast-moving times is virtually immobilized by bleak and desolate feelings that accompany loneliness, and it can happen and does in large doses at Christmas as I just read from that article in “Christianity Today.”

There are certain life circumstances and surrounding that can prompt such feeling... but it can strike anywhere. The Apostle Paul experienced it and from him we may find some needed help

in dealing with such feelings. In that damp, dark dungeon the Apostle Paul wrestled with such feelings. His timely and final words linger to this day, offering wise and needed counsel in impersonal and difficult times like these.

“⁹Do your best to come to me quickly, ¹⁰for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. ¹²I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. ¹³When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. ¹⁴Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. ¹⁵You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. ¹⁶At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. ¹⁷But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” ¹⁹Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. ²¹Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers and sisters. ²²The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all.” – 2 Timothy 4:9-22 (NIV)

I. WHEN LONELINESS STRIKES (2 Timothy 4:9-21)

The emotion is not known only by those without God: loneliness strikes the godly as well... both the weak and the strong. It respects no one. In the Hebrew 11 listing of the experiences of courageous men and women, we find that they were people who all felt deep loneliness at times (Heb. 11:36-39).

“³⁶Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— ³⁸the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground ³⁹These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.” – Hebrews 11:36-39 (NIV)

They were mocked, scourged, chained, imprisoned, stoned, and killed; they went about destitute, afflicted, mistreated; they wandered about living in caves and holes of the ground. They knew penetrating loneliness. Paul did as well. In his most autobiographical statement... the 2 Corinthians letter... he named personal experiences that pulsed with loneliness (2 Cor. 11:24-28).

“²⁴Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷I have labored and toiled and have often gone without

sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ *Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.* – 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 (NIV)

However, the most eloquent of Paul's own writings on the subject of loneliness were penned in his final days of life and recorded in his second letter to Timothy. From his words we find at least four times when loneliness strikes. What is true of Paul's experience is also true of ours.

4 Times When Loneliness Strikes:

1. **When we are distant from cherished friends (vv. 10-12, 19-20)** – Notice verses 10-12 and verses 19-20, *“¹⁰for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. ¹²I sent Tychicus to Ephesus.”* And in verses 19-20, *“¹⁹Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.”* Ones to whom he had been close were now gone for varying reasons: Demas, compromising his faith, deserted Him; Crescens had gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia; Pricilla and Aquilla were engaged in their own ministry; Erastus was in Corinth; Trophimus was sick in Miletus. Except for Luke, those on whom he had depended for love and support were scattered. He needed at that moment cherished, intimate friends.
2. **When our memories bring nostalgic reminders (vv. 16-17)** – Notice verses 16-17, *“¹⁶At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. ¹⁷But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth.”* Paul was reviewing his yesteryears, thinking of the times that were. He thought back to his first defense when he discovered himself alone and unsupported. He remembered the way God stood with him and provided him strength to preach. The sights, sounds, and smells of another day were fresh in his thinking.
3. **When certain times of the year occur (vv. 9, 21)** – Look at verse 9 again, *“⁹Do your best to come to me quickly... and again in verse 21, “²¹Do your best to get here before winter...”* Winter was coming... it was on its way. The change of the season could be felt down below in the stony, dark dungeon of the Mamertine Prison. He implored Timothy, “Make every effort to come to me soon... before winter.”
4. **When we feel forgotten and shelved** – This is especially true for those who have once known the joys and rewards of service... involvement... usefulness, having been in the mainstream of ministry as Paul had been, only to be snatched away suddenly or removed gradually.

What effects can loneliness have on the life of a believer. The following are some of the ensuing results that can come upon a life at the hand of this powerful and overwhelming cloud of loneliness.

4 Results of Loneliness on the Life of a Believer:

1. Forsaken (v.9) –
2. Fearful (vv.14-15) –
3. Angry (v.14) –
4. Abandoned (v.16) -

II. WHAT LONELINESS DOES

We move from a bleak picture to one that is brighter. Loneliness does not have to be a wasted moment for us. From loneliness can arise at least two positive results.

2 Positives that Can Grow from Loneliness:

1. **It makes us aware of others' significance (v.11)** – Notice verse 11, *“^{d1} Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”* The apostle may have never appreciated Dr. Luke so much as he did in the dungeon. Luke was the only one with him... one who could assist his physical needs. Paul even viewed John Mark in a different light. In Acts 15:36-40 we find that he had little respect for this one he considered a deserter. As a matter of fact, Paul and his associate, Barnabas, split up because of the negative feelings Paul had about John Mark. Now, in his final days, he saw Mark's value.
2. **It forces us to turn our concerns over to God** – Even though he had been wronged by Alexander the coppersmith, he left that matter with God, Who would repay his opponent according to his deeds (v.14). Even though he could have worried over the circumstances holding him in confinement, he focused on the Lord's ability to deliver him and His capability to keep him safe (v.18).

III. HOW LONELINESS IS CONTROLLED

None of us are immune to loneliness. When it wraps itself about us, we cannot simply cast it aside. The question is not, “How do I get rid of it?”... you probably don't... not really... it's an emotion that comes and goes... a deep seeded emotion that can have various catalyst for its presence in a life. The question is instead, “How can I handle it now that it's present?”

4 Ways To Help Control Loneliness and It's Effects:

1. **By investing time with intimate friends or developing friendships –**
2. **By taking care of bodily needs –**
3. **By stretching the mind on good books –**
4. **By spending time in the Scriptures -**

IV. SOME FINAL HELPS FOR CHRISTMAS LONELINESS FROM DR. BILLY GRAHAM

For years Dr. Billy Graham wrote a syndicated letter column in newspapers around the country. People wrote in to him and he responded with pastoral help and Biblical counsel. He always received many letters at Christmas dealing with this very subject... loneliness at Christmas. In this particular letter we find some help and instruction.

BILLY GRAHAM'S MY ANSWER: DEALING WITH CHRISTMAS LONELINESS

Dear Dr. Graham,

This Christmas will be hard for me. Most of my relatives are gone now (including my husband), and the few I do have are either too old or live too far away. I am completely alone. Please tell people to reach out to lonely people during holidays, because it's hard for them.

– Lonely at Christmas

Dear Lonely,

Thank you for your letter—and I hope many readers will take your words to heart. You're right: Holidays are especially hard when we've lost our loved ones or they aren't near us, and the friendship of another person is especially welcome then.

Let me point out two truths about loneliness. First, we are never completely alone when we know Jesus Christ. When we turn to Christ in faith and commit our lives to Him, He comes to live within us by His Spirit, and He is constantly with us. Jesus' promise is true: "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Is Christ real to you?

Second, God wants us to reach out to those who are lonely and let them know we care. When we feel all alone, it's hard to reach out to others – and yet that may be exactly what we need to do to overcome our own loneliness. All around you are people who may be just as lonely as you are. Ask God to help you to be a friend to them.

Remember: No one was ever lonelier than Jesus when He went to the cross for us. He knows what it is to be lonely! But because He died and rose again for us, He is with us now—and will be with us through all eternity.

–Dr. Billy Graham

2 Helps for Christmas Loneliness from Dr. Billy Graham:

- 1. Remember that you are never completely alone when you know Jesus Christ -**
- 2. Reach out to others who are lonely and let them know you care –**