

## Promises of Presence

Loneliness!

Worse than cancer!

Worse than disability!

If we have friends and family surrounding us, then cancer is easier to bear. If we have others who share and understand disability, then we don't feel so helpless.

If there is no-one to share our physical pain, our emotional struggles, our spiritual battles – then we are truly alone, without hope and potentially without life. People have died or taken their lives because of loneliness.

What is loneliness? Loneliness is a feeling of separation; of disconnection; and causes depression and anxiety. It affects our physical and spiritual health – people turn to drink, to drugs, to pornography, to food, to unacceptable relationships in order to combat loneliness.

Loneliness is different from being alone, or wanting to be alone.

Loneliness is a matter of attitude. You can actually choose to stay lonely.

### What Causes Loneliness?

- the death of someone or something you love
- divorce or separation
- Problems with relationships – building walls around yourself, shutting people out and yourself in
- Disability – being different to the majority of others – being unable to communicate effectively
- Feelings of guilt that you are judged or condemned by God – losing joy and contentment
- Poor Me Syndrome - a distorted your view of yourself and of others– I don't feel loved, Nobody loves me! Nobody will accept me because....
- Fear of rejection – you don't want to share joy with others in your life in case they reject you
- Childhood experiences of neglect, ridicule, bullying, unrealistic expectations. "I don't know what love is – therefore I don't know how to love other people"

These things are all legitimate causes of loneliness and hurt.

But if loneliness is an attitude, then we need to change the way we think to get rid of loneliness. Through the grace of God, you can overcome loneliness. Shutting people out only stops you from receiving what you want or need. The first step is to get connected to God, because loneliness started way back when Adam and Eve decided to disobey God - then when God came looking for them, they were ashamed and hid. A beautiful relationship was destroyed because of sin.

But it doesn't have to be that way! Here's a few things God says about you:

Isaiah 41: 9 I have chosen you and have not rejected you

Isaiah 43:4 You are precious, I give you honour, I love you

Zephaniah 3: 17 I rejoice over you with singing

I'm delighted with you

You can rest and feel safe in my Love

Genesis 1: 26 - 28 You are created in My image I've blessed you

I've given you a job to do

Jesus came to reconcile us to God – to bring us back into a right/happy relationship with God. He died on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven and we could start a new relationship with God. The first step to overcoming loneliness is to say:

“God I need You in my life. I want to get to know You and love You. I want to spend time with You. I want You to be my closest friend. I want You to teach me how to love other people.”

2 Corinthians 5:18 – 19

“Through Christ, God made peace between us and himself, and God gave us the work of telling everyone about the peace we can have with him.

God was in Christ, making peace between the world and himself. God did not hold the world guilty of its sins. And he gave us this message of peace.”

Some Bibles use the word – reconciliation – which really means bringing peace to relationships.

When you are reconciled to God He promises His Holy Presence with us all the time.

Listen to what Psalm 139 tells us:

Vs 1 - 18 (Read)

WOW! We have a God who is with us all the time, no matter what and more than that – He's thinking about us all the time!

You know, my dog's like that. Every morning without fail, she wakes me up. It's so good to have a furry, cuddly alarm clock that is really pleased to see me even though I'm not my best first thing in the morning! Wherever I go, she's there. Whatever room of the house I'm in she comes and lies down beside me or sits on my feet! When I'm at work, she's under my desk. When I'm in bed, she's on the floor near me. When I garden, she leaps around chasing butterflies and birds. She brings me a lot of joy and makes me feel safe. She's so loyal! I only have to look at my Dog to be reminded of my loving God. Isn't God good to give me such a tangible reminder!

Now, you don't have to have a dog to be reminded of God (even though it helps!), because when Jesus returned to heaven, He promised to give another Comforter, another Helper, another Counsellor to advise us – the Holy Spirit.

When you are reconciled to God and born again into His family, the Holy Spirit comes to live in your life. He'll never leave you! You have 24/7 access to wisdom, guidance and; power or strength to live the kind of life God wants you to.

And what is this kind of life? If we go back to 2 Corinthians 5:19 we learn that God wants us to have the ministry of reconciliation – of bringing peace to relationships, of living out the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

If you have any sort of relationship – work relationships, caregivers, family, church, friends – you will have plenty of times to practice showing the fruit of the Spirit.

Every breath you take, every word you say, every action you do - is an opportunity to come closer to God and closer to other people.

Yes, it's a cycle! We spend time in God's presence and we are equipped to spend profitable time with other people.

How can we be sure of God's presence? Here's some promises for a start:

Matt 28:30 " I will be with you always, even until the end of this age"

Rom 8:35 – 38 NOTHING now or in the future will ever be able to separate us from God's love

Isaiah 43: 1- 3 (New Living Translation)

I love these verses because they talk of going *through* with God right there beside us – going through – not staying in that state.

And to sum up Psalm 16: 5 – 11 (The Answer)

If you ever doubt God's presence in your life, if you ever feel depressed and lonely then get into the Psalms – you will read about ordinary people who struggled with their faith and their feelings but then they remembered times in the past when God had been with them, when God had given them victory, protection, courage, joy and many other reasons to burst into praise and gratitude.

Hebrews 4: 14 – 15 reminds us that Jesus understands our weaknesses and difficulties, because He Himself has been through them. Think about it. He was rejected in his home town of Nazareth. He was criticised and misunderstood by the religious leaders. Then as He tried to tell His disciples, -His closest friends- about the end of His life on earth, they just didn't get it! They were too concerned arguing over who was going to be the greatest. Did they even listen to Him!

Then right at the very end, the three disciples who bragged that they could suffer with Him and would always be there for Him – couldn't! Jesus specifically took them with Him to support Him in His struggle. He asked them to pray and keep watch – and what did they do? They went to sleep! There was no-one to share His agony and His pain. No-one to encourage Him. No-one to pray with Him. No-one!

He went through His trial with no-one sticking up for Him. No-one telling the truth. No-one giving witness about the miracles they had seen. No-one to tell how He'd healed them. No-one even to be a friend.

He took all that rejection, betrayal and the pain of loneliness to the cross and He died for you – because He loves you!

You think God doesn't understand your loneliness? You think He doesn't care when people let you down?

He does – He does!

When Jesus died – when even God couldn't look on the sin (our sin) that He was carrying, the curtain in the temple was torn in two -giving us full access to God and His presence. Jesus is called Our Great High Priest in Hebrews. In the Old Testament, only the High Priest could go into the most Holy place of the temple and meet with God.

Because of His death, His willingness to take all our sins, all of our failings, Jesus made a way for us to come directly into God - the presence of God! We can go right in to the most Holy Place. We can stand before God's throne of grace. There we can receive mercy and grace to help us when we need it" (Hebrews 4: 16)

And that's the key – because when we come to God with our hurts and disappointments. When we spend time in His presence – He reminds us of what He has done for us and He gives us His amazing grace so that we can show mercy to other people.

We can forgive their short-comings. We can be gracious to them, even though they've hurt us. When we are filled with joy and peace from being in His presence – that joy and peace flows through us to other people.

This weekend, you are at the Christian Fellowship for Disabled Camp.

Fellowship means connected.

This weekend is a perfect time for you to spend time in God's presence – getting connected to Him and then spending time with other campers connecting with them – being Jesus to them, loving them, laughing with them, listening to them, praying with them, getting to know them and encouraging them in their relationship with God and with others.

## Prayer

*Father God – thank You so much for your plan of salvation. You want everyone to have a personal relationship with You. You have promised never to leave us or forsake us. You have promised Your Holy Spirit to live in us. You have promised to be with us always – every day, until the end of the age.*

*You have said in Your Word:*

*“Do not fear, for I am with you.*

*Do not be dismayed, for I am your God,*

*I will strengthen you and help you;*

*I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

*Father, I pray for those who are struggling with their relationship with You and their relationships with others. I pray that you will speak the peace of Your promises into their lives.*

*And I pray that each of us will be aware of Your presence with us each moment. That we would be filled with joy just knowing that You are here and that we would take opportunities to be with other people this weekend, growing in our relationship with You and our relationship with each other.*

*In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*