

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO COMMON PROBLEMS

Lesson – 2

"The Problem of Loneliness"

INTRODUCTION:

I. Years ago, a young 13-year old girl, who was going through a VERY difficult time in her life, sat down in a park on a cold winter day, and wrote the following poem. She titled it "Loneliness."

A. Here is what she wrote:

"Loneliness is like the color light blue. It feels like you're sitting on a bench in a park on a cold winter day, with no one around. It smells like something plain. The sound of loneliness is like the breeze dancing through the trees; the taste of it is something dry and rough." (Kathi Webb, March 1993)

B. Loneliness has been called the most desolate word in the English language.

1. And we all know why.

a. We've heard the sound of a car in the driveway that brought back memories of someone who isn't there any longer.

- b. We've awoken with the cover rumped only on our side of the bed, and the pillow next to us empty.
 - c. We've eaten dinners for one at tables for two or more.
 - d. And we waited for the phone to ring, hoping it would bring us out of our loneliness, but it never rings.
 - 2. We know how loneliness feels.
- C. But if there is any comfort knowing that we're not alone in feeling lonely – that others have been there before us – perhaps we can find that comfort by turning to the Scriptures and looking at the final years in the life of one particular Bible character.
 - 1. The words we're going to be reading are the emotional words of a man who was known for his great logic – but these will words that were penned from a heart that literally ACHED with loneliness.
 - a. And as we read, we need to read BETWEEN THE LINES to find out where his loneliness came from and how he dealt with it.
 - 2. Of course, the man I'm speaking about is the great apostle Paul.
 - a. And his words are found in a letter he wrote to his dear friend, and son "in the faith," Timothy.

- b. In fact, from all we know, this is the last letter he would
EVER write – the letter of Second Timothy.

II. **Second Timothy chapter 4** leaves us with little doubt that the apostle Paul knew his life was coming to an end.

A. He had come to the end of a rich, full life, but he had come with persecution and pain – and most of all, with loneliness.

- 1. Let's look at some of the reasons why this man, who had maintained a deep fellowship with God and Jesus Christ, would experience this kind of heartache in his final days.

BODY:

I. Let's begin by taking a closer look at Paul's situation – and try to understand the reasons for his loneliness.

A. The first reason for Paul's loneliness came from his location – the place where he was being forced to spend his final days.

- 1. It's really difficult to fully appreciate a passage of Scripture until you've explored the circumstances in which it was written.

- a. As we said before, this was not only Paul's last letter to Timothy, but from all we know, it was the last letter he would ever write.

- (1). It wasn't written from his study, or from his dining room table in a warm, comfortable home.
 - (2). It was scrawled on parchment or some other writing material while in the dark, damp recesses of a dungeon cell in the bowels of the ancient city of Rome.
2. Most scholars believe that Paul was imprisoned in the Mamertine Prison of Rome.
- a. In his book, *"Especially the Parchments,"* author Charles Ryrie writes:
 - (1). "Any tourist today who leaves the guided tours and makes his own way under the brow of the Capitoline Hill in Rome will find himself admitted to a narrow, dark stairway. Descending the winding stone staircase he finally comes to the dismal, dark, low-arched chamber where the apostle lay bound waiting to be offered up. Even on a hot summer day the visitor will sense the dampness of the dungeon."
- B. The second reason for Paul's loneliness came from his relationship to others.

1. Paul was used to being with groups of people, ministering either TO them or WITH them.
 - a. But now, the only voices that echoed this depressing stone cell were those of his guards and his faithful friend Luke.
 - b. Listen to these words of deep despair – words of incredible loneliness. **2 Timothy 4:9-11a** – *“Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica – Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me...”*
2. What a terrible way for this great man of God to spend his final days.
 - a. Forsaken by one friend.
 - b. Unable to go with two others as they continued to minister.
3. Now, there are no crowds – no small group of loyal disciples to be with him.
 - a. He is alone – with the exception of his dear friend Luke, the doctor.
4. Have you ever wondered why Luke was with him?

- a. Could it be that Paul not only needed the companionship of a dear and loyal friend like Luke, but that he needed medical attention as well?
- C. The third reason for Paul's loneliness was the time of year.
1. Winter was coming – probably only a month or two away.
 - a. It was the Fall of the year, for a man who was in the Autumn of his life.
 - b. The warm summer sun was now fading sooner every day, and the nights were getting longer and colder.
 - c. The chilling winds of winter were just around the corner.
 2. Paul pleads with his friend Timothy: "*do your utmost to come before winter.*" **(v. 21a)**
- D. The fourth reason for Paul's loneliness came from his thoughts about the future.
1. I have no doubts but that Paul longed for the day when he would enter into heaven.
 - a. But no matter how unafraid he was of death, I don't think Paul wanted his life to end this way.
 - (1). Chained in a damp, dark prison cell, dying little by little, always waiting for the day of his execution.

2. He knew the end was near. **2 Timothy 4:6-8** – *“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*

E. The final reason for Paul's loneliness was because his mind was filled with bittersweet memories.

1. They were memories of great victories, and crushing defeats that constantly swelled in his heart and touched his soul. **2 Timothy 4:16-17** – *“At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.”*

II. Paul had good reasons to be lonely, but unlike most of us, he didn't isolate himself and wallow in self-pity – instead, he wrote a letter requesting four things to make his final days tolerable.

- A. The first thing Paul asked for was companionship. **2 Timothy 4:9, 11** – *“Be diligent to come to me quickly... Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.”*
1. Not just any companionship – in addition to Timothy, Paul specifically wanted Mark to come. **(v. 11)**
 - a. At one time Paul became very disappointed in Mark, and felt the young man was not worthy to continue traveling with him and Barnabas. **(Acts 15:36-41)**
 - b. Now, Paul’s attitude toward young Mark had changed – Paul had come to see just useful Mark would be in helping the aged apostle with his ministry.
 - c. However, Paul didn't issue a "come-one-come-all" kind of invitation.
 - d. He didn't want a room full of strangers.
 - e. When you're lonely, really lonely, you don't want to be around a lot of strangers either. You only want to be with your closest friends – people who are willing to be there whenever you need them.
 2. But maybe that's the problem – you feel your close friends are too busy.
 - a. Have you asked them?

- (1). Have you openly and honestly said to them, "I would like for you to come and visit me, because right now, I'm really feeling very lonely?"
 - b. Or maybe you need to BE a friend to someone else who is even more lonely than you – someone who can help YOU get out of your loneliness by being there for THEM.
- B. The second thing Paul asked for was his cloak. **2 Timothy 4:13a** – *"Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come..."*
 1. Apostle or not, Paul wasn't so "spiritual" that he didn't feel the cold.
 - a. He was just human enough to want his favorite garment.
 - b. Listen to Charles Ryrie as he describes Paul's cloak.
 - (1). "Look at that cloak for a moment. It was a traveling cloak with long sleeves. Perhaps Paul had woven it himself, and it may have been over its sleeves that other cloaks had been draped when Stephen was martyred. It had a rich history in the service of Christ. It had been wet with the brine of the Aegean, yellow with the dust of the Ignatian Way, white with the snows of Galatia and Pamphylia, and crimson with the blood of his own wounds. And now it was to serve its last purpose

and keep an aged man warm during a cold winter."

2. Paul's request for his cloak tells me something else.
 - a. He never became so eager to die that he gave up trying to take care of himself.
 - (1). Loneliness has a way of draining the life out of us.
 - (a). Many lose their appetite for food, while others neglect eating the right kinds of foods – maybe even eating too much of the wrong kinds of foods.
 - b. But as Paul came to the end of his life, he continued to take care of his physical needs.
 - (1). Are you doing that?
 - (2). Are you keeping your loneliness from consuming you?

C. But there was a third thing Paul requested. In addition to his cloak, he wanted his reading material. **2 Timothy 4:13b** – “...and the books, especially the parchments.”

1. These were evidently works OTHER than Scripture.
 - a. Some have suggested that these might have been some of the great works of literature that had helped him form much of his thinking.

- (1). Possibly writings from Jewish scholars, maybe even the writings of someone like rabbi Gamaliel.
 2. Paul wanted to keep his mind fresh and alive.
 - a. He had spent many hours in his earlier years learning and studying, and he wanted to continue expanding his mind even in his last days on earth.
 - b. Being surrounded by his books would be much like being surrounded by old, dear friends.
 3. There is nothing that can help lift us up from the depths of loneliness than to spend time reading "uplifting" books.
 - a. I'm not talking about "escapism books" – fantasy or adventure novels – although there's nothing wrong with a good adventure novel, now and then.
 - b. But, I'm talking about reading something along "inspirational" lines.
 - c. These kinds of books can help us turn our focus off ourselves, and begin looking upward toward Jesus Christ.
- D. Finally, Paul asked for “the parchments.” In fact, these writings were SO important to Paul that he wrote; *especially the parchments.*
- (v. 13b)**
1. What were the parchments?

- a. They were his copies of the Scriptures.
 - (1). The ones with the dog-eared pages and notes in the margins – the ones with circled words and torn covers.
 - b. Paul wanted to spend his final days IMMERSED in the Word of God.
2. Have you ever wondered WHAT scriptures Paul would have spent time reading?
- a. Do you think he went back over the letters he wrote to the church in Rome, or the letters to the Corinthians, or the Galatians, or Ephesians, not to mention the church at Thessalonica, Phillippi or Colossee?
 - b. Or did he read the letters written by his dear friend Peter, or the one written by the Lord's brother, James?
 - c. If I've learned anything about Paul, he probably spent time in what we call the Old Testament.
 - (1). I can imagine him sitting on the cold stone floor, leaning up against the dampened wall of his cell, listening with his eyes closed while Luke reads to him from the Psalms.
 - (2). Perhaps Luke read the words of Psalm 56 – written by David while he was sitting all alone in a

Philistine prison cell in the city of Gath, miles from home and from his friends. **Psalm 56:3-4** –

“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?”

- (3). Maybe Paul asked Luke to read Psalms 42

Psalm 42:1-3; 11 – *As the deer pants for the*

water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When

shall I come and appear before God? My tears

have been my food day and night, while they

continually say to me, "Where is your God?"...

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are

you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I

shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance

and my God.

3. Nothing can help you cope with loneliness more than spending time alone with the God of heaven in Scripture.
- a. When you pick up your Bible and begin to read, especially from the Psalms, don't you sense the presence of God Himself?

- b. Don't you hear Him communing with you – speaking to you from the pages of His divinely inspired book?
- c. The comfort He brings may not share your table or your couch, but it will fill the emptiness in your soul and bring warmth to your heart.
- d. It seems fitting that we would close with words written by the apostle Paul himself – words that remind us of God's INFINITE love.

(1). **Romans 8:38-39** – Paul wrote; *"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

CONCLUSION:

- I. Have you been experiencing loneliness?
 - A. Then you can certainly empathize with the apostle Paul.

1. Maybe you're being forced to spend your days in a situation that, to you, is as oppressive as the walls of Paul's dark dungeon.
 2. Perhaps those who were once your close friends have either forsaken you, or are busy with their own lives.
 3. Or maybe you've recently lost someone close to you – a husband or a wife – and the memories are still fresh in your mind.
 4. Maybe, it's the time of year that is contributing to your loneliness – (it doesn't necessarily have to be winter; it can be the holiday seasons, or dates like birthdays or anniversaries).
 5. For others, perhaps your loneliness stems from the fact that you're also approaching the winter of your life.
 6. And who can forget a lifetime of memories – all those bittersweet memories that swell within your heart.
- B. If you're going through a time of loneliness, then you need to do what Paul did to cope with his.
1. Ask for companionship – tell someone close what's going on in your life, and that you need to spend some time with them.
 2. Attend to you own needs, especially your physical needs.
 - a. Don't become so preoccupied with your own loneliness that you neglect your health.

3. Spend time reading devotional or inspirational books that can bring hope and give you a clearer vision of tomorrow.
4. But, most of all, spend time with "*the parchments, especially the parchments*" – the Scriptures.
 - a. Open your heart and let God speak to your needs. Let Him bring comfort, companionship and warmth to your lonely days and nights through His divinely inspired Word.

II. When we stop to think about it, there's really no need for any of us to be lonely. Why?

A. Because Jesus Christ did away with loneliness when He died on the Cross to bring us into an eternal relationship with the Father.

1. Are you able to enjoy that kind of intimate relationship with the Father because you've surrendered your life to Jesus Christ?
 - a. If not, won't you start right now?