

# Biblical Psychology 101

## Loneliness

### Lesson Two

#### INTRODUCTION:

I. Years ago (21 years ago, to be exact), a young 13-year old girl was going through a very difficult time in her life.

A. One cold overcast day she sat down on a park bench, took out a pen and some paper and wrote the following poem. She titled it "Loneliness."

1. 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. It has been said that the word "loneliness" is the most desolate word in the English language.

1. If we were to search a dictionary for the meaning of loneliness it would be defined as:

- a. Being without companionship... being without the support, encouragement and comfort of others... without the warmth and affection of others... the depressing feeling that accompanies being alone.
2. We all know how loneliness feels.
    - a. At one time or another we have all experienced that deep longing for the warmth and affection that comes from companionship.
    - b. For some the feelings of loneliness were only temporary; for others the feeling of loneliness lingers day after day, week after week, year after year.
- C. If there is any comfort in knowing we're not alone – in knowing that others, including several Biblical characters, have experienced loneliness – we can find the comfort we're seeking by turning to the Scriptures and look at the final years in the life of one particular man.
1. The words this man used to describe his loneliness come from the pen of one who was known for his great inner strength and for his deep faith in Jesus Christ.
  2. Even though this man was known for his intellect and powers of reason and logic, the words he wrote came from a heart that literally ached from loneliness.

3. However, more than simply read his words, we need to look behind each word to understand the cause for his loneliness and what he did to deal with it.
- C. If you haven't already guessed who I'm speaking about, the man is simply known in the Scriptures as Paul, and his words are found in a letter he wrote to his dear friend, and son "in the faith," Timothy.
1. In fact, from all we know, this is the last letter he ever wrote.
  2. Today, we know this letter as "Second Timothy."
- II. This morning as we launch into our study I've entitled "Biblical Psychology 101" we're going to focus on the cause and the solution for Paul's deep sense of "Loneliness."
- A. As we read the words of Paul in Second Timothy chapter 4 it becomes clear that the apostle knew his life was coming to an end.
1. He was approaching the end of a rich, full life.
  2. But that life had also been filled with persecution and pain – and most of all, with loneliness.
  3. Let's look at some of the reasons why this man, who had maintained a deep and intimate relationship with God and Jesus Christ, would experience the heartache of loneliness in his final days.

**BODY:**

- I. To begin, let's take a close look at Paul's situation – this will help us understand the reasons for the loneliness he experienced.
  - A. One of the reasons for Paul's loneliness came from his location – the place where he was forced to spend his final days.
    1. I've always heard it said to truly understand a passage of Scripture we need to understand the circumstances in which it was written.
    2. In regard to the letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy this was not only the last letter Paul wrote to this young evangelist, as we mentioned earlier, it was most likely the last letter Paul ever wrote.
      - a. This was not a letter written from a preacher's study, or from the dining room table in a warm comfortable home.
      - b. This letter was scrawled on parchment or some other writing material while Paul sat in chains in the dark, damp recesses of a dungeon cell in the bowels of the ancient city of Rome.
      - c. Most historians and Biblical scholars believe Paul was imprisoned in the Mamertine Prison of Rome.
    3. In his book, "*Especially the Parchments*," author Charles Ryrie writes:

- a. "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."
4. Chained in a cold dark dungeon beneath the streets of Rome is certainly not the place any of us would want to spend our final days.
  - a. But it was from that very dungeon that a letter would emerge to take its place alongside other inspired writings of the man we know as the apostle Paul.
- B. I think another reason for Paul's sense of loneliness came from his relationship to others.
  1. The last 20 years of Paul's life were spent preaching to crowds of people wherever he could find them, as well as ministering to saints in many congregations he helped to establish.
    - a. During those years Paul was always with people – groups both large and small.

- b. And even as he went from place to place, traveling thousands of miles to preach and teach the gospel, Paul was always accompanied by faithful, devoted friends and co-laborers.
    - c. He was either ministering to people or he was with people.
  2. But now, the only voices that echoed in this depressing stone cell were those of his guards and his faithful friend Luke.
  3. Listen to these words of deep despair – words of incredible loneliness. He tells Timothy:
    - a. **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..."*
    - b. What a terribly lonely way for this great man of God to spend his final days:
      - (1). Forsaken by one friend.
      - (2). Unable to go with two others as they continued to minister.
  4. Paul was no longer able to preach to large crowds – he was no longer able to enjoy the companionship of the small group of fellow disciples that had accompanied him in his past journeys.

- a. He is alone – with the exception of his dear friend Luke, the doctor.
5. And why Luke? 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 also needed medical attention?
  - b. Being chained in a cold wet dungeon cell, devoid of any sunlight except for what little may come through a hole in the floor above his cell, is the kind of environment that would take a physical toll on any man.
  - c. But imagine how a place like this would affect a man close to 70 years of age who had also experienced this kind of abuse:  
    - (1). **2 Corinthians 11:24-27** – *From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often,*

*in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness...*

- d. I can only imagine the physical pain this great man of God must have endured in those final months.
  - e. So it doesn't surprise me that Luke, the physician, would choose to remain by Paul's side to the end.
- C. In addition to being alone, except for Luke, I think another 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 faded sooner every day, and the nights were getting longer and colder.
  - 2. Therefore Paul pleaded with his friend Timothy:
    - a. **2 Timothy 4:21a** – *"Do your utmost to come before winter."*
    - b. The chilling winds of winter were just around the corner – which meant travel would not only be slower, it would also be more dangerous.
    - c. Paul knew he was running out of time, and so he desperately needed Timothy to come as soon as possible.

- D. Another reason for Paul's loneliness most likely came from his thoughts about the future.
1. Years earlier, when Paul was under house arrest in Rome, he was confident of his eventual release. He expressed this in a couple of his letters:
    - a. In his letter to the Philippians Paul wrote he was sending Timothy to encourage them, and hoped to join them *"as soon as I see how it goes with me"* (**Philippians 2:19-24**).
    - b. And in his letter to Philemon Paul wrote, *"prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you."* (**Philemon 22**).
  2. This time, however, Paul knew his imprisonment would end in death – and that death would come at the hands of the Christian-hating emperor Nero.
    - a. **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."*

3. Even though Paul was not afraid of death and even longed to be with the Lord, no one would want their life to end while chained in a cold dark prison cell, growing weaker every day, while waiting for the day of his execution.
  4. Most of us hope to be surrounded by our family and close friends when that day comes.
  5. But that was not in Paul's future.
- E. And finally, Paul's loneliness could most likely be attributed to all the bittersweet memories that must have flooded his mind.
1. Memories of great victories mixed with those of crushing defeats must have constantly swelled in his heart.
    - a. **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."*

2. Despite the comforting companionship of Luke, and the hope that Timothy would soon join him, in the end Paul knew there was really only One who would always be there for him – the Lord.
- II. Paul had good reasons to feel loneliness. But unlike many who suffer from loneliness, Paul didn't isolate himself or 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.
1. **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."*
    - a. Not just any companionship would do. In addition to Timothy, Paul also wanted Mark to come. **(v. 11)**
    - b. If you recall from our studies of Acts (**cf. Acts 15:36-41**), there was a time when Paul felt Mark was more of a burden than a helper.
    - c. During Paul's first missionary journey with Barnabas, Mark got homesick and left. So as Paul and Barnabas prepared for their second journey, Barnabas wanted to give Mark another chance. But Paul would have none of it.

- d. But during Paul's final years his attitude toward young Mark had changed – Paul had come to appreciate Mark and knew this young man would be useful in helping the aged apostle in these final months.
2. What can we learn from Paul's first request – his request for companionship?
    - a. When someone begins feeling they're all alone, it's not uncommon for them to believe no one really cares about them anymore – no one wants to spend time with them.
    - b. Assuming you're not wallowing in self-pity (because no one wants to be around that kind of person), you might be surprised to learn people want to spend time with you but you haven't invited them. You've been waiting for them to invite you.
    - c. But an even better solution would be for you to spend time with someone who is even lonelier than you – someone who can help you get out of your loneliness by you being a friend to them.
  3. Paul knew companionship would help him overcome loneliness – so he asked for Timothy and Mark to come to him as soon as possible.

- B. The second thing Paul asked for was his cloak.
1. **2 Timothy 4:13a** – *"Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come..."*
  2. That cloak held a lot of memories for Paul. Listen to Charles Ryrie as he describes Paul's cloak in his book *"Especially The Parchments."*
    - a. "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."
  3. I think there may be another reason for Paul asking for his cloak.
    - a. Winter was coming and Paul needed to stay as warm as he could.

- b. Despite being in such a desolate and depressing place, Paul 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.
  - (2). In fact, many lose their appetite for food and become malnourished, while others neglect eating the right kinds of foods or maybe even eating too much of the wrong kinds of foods.
- 4. Even though the time of Paul's departure was at hand, he didn't stop living.
  - a. He continued to take care of his physical needs as best as he could.
  - b. Paul didn't let his loneliness consume him. He was determined to live till the day he died.
- C. In addition to his cloak, Paul also requested his reading material.
  - 1. **2 Timothy 4:13b** – "*...and the books...*"
  - 2. What books would these have been? Most likely they were books other than the Scriptures.
    - a. Some have suggested that these might have been some of the great works of literature that had helped Paul form much of

his thinking – quite possibly the writings of Jewish rabbinical scholars like Gamaliel.

3. I see this as an indication that Paul wanted to keep his mind fresh and alive.
  - a. In his youth Paul had spent countless hours learning and studying – growing intellectually as well as in his knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures.
  - b. And now in his final days Paul either wanted to continue expanding his mind, or at the very least take one last journey back through the books he treasured so much.
4. What can we learn from this? Nothing can help lift us up from the depths of loneliness than to occupy our mind with something uplifting – like reading something uplifting.
  - 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 turn our focus off ourselves and help us look upward toward Jesus Christ.

5. If Paul is like most preachers I know, including myself, being surrounded by his books would be to Paul much like being surrounded by old, dear friends.
- D. Finally, Paul asked for "the parchments."
1. In fact, these writings were so important to Paul that he wrote; *"especially the parchments."* **(v. 13b)**
  2. What were the parchments? The parchments were Paul's copies of the Scriptures.
    - a. The parchments with the dog-eared pages, and notes scribbled in the margins – the ones with circled and underlined words and old worn out 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 enjoyed reading during these final days?
    - a. Perhaps he spent time reading letters he had written 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. Perhaps Paul enjoyed reading the letters written by his dear friend Peter, or perhaps the letter written by James, the Lord's brother.
- c. If I've learned anything about Paul, I believe he would have spent a lot of time immersed in what we call the Old Testament.
  - (1). I can imagine him sitting in 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.
  
4. The next time you're feeling all alone I challenge you to pick up your Bible and read these words written by the apostle Paul:
  - a. **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."*
  - b. **Hebrews 13:5** – *For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

5. I can't promise that you will never find yourself devoid of human companionship, but I can assure you of never lacking Divine companionship.

## **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, are busy with their own lives, or have moved away.
    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 causing to your loneliness – (it doesn't have to be winter; it can be the holiday seasons, or dates like birthdays or anniversaries).
    5. For others, maybe 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 – or, better yet, seek the companionship of those who need companionship themselves – the world is filled with people who are far more lonely than any of us.
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 uplifting, inspirational books that can bring joy today, and give you hope for 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 from His Word.
  - b. 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 in one sense 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?