

27.04.2019 WHEN ALONE

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." Genesis 2:18

Loneliness in society has reached epidemic proportions in the developed world. At Creation God declared that *'being alone'* was not good. Because of the context it was written in - the creation of woman, we often extrapolate from this that the answer to being alone is always found in marriage. This is not necessarily so. God's desire is that man should realise that he was created a social being and was created to live in relationship: to God first and to his fellow men next. The marriage and family bond is the most important factor in preventing social isolation which is the major reason for loneliness. While we know that the elderly suffer from social isolation, studies today show that that youth suffer equal or greater amounts of loneliness in society.

Interestingly, the word 'loneliness' did not exist before 1814.

Most research acknowledges the role of modernity in the "epidemic" (the rise of single households, less face-to-face interaction, the influence of social media) but presumes people have always been lonely. But that's not the case. Loneliness as a problem is a product of modern ways of thinking about the self and society. Before 1800, the English word "loneliness" did not exist. People lived in small communities, they tended to believe in God (which meant they were never really alone, even when they were physically isolated), and there was a philosophical concept of the community as a source of common good. There was no need for a language of loneliness.

Of course, solitude existed, and solitude (when not chosen) could be damaging, just as loneliness is today. But the modern, existential angst of feeling alone couldn't exist, because the modern "individual" didn't emerge until the 19th century, with industrialisation in the west and the creation of philosophical and political systems focusing on individualism. Scientific medicine separated mind and body, identifying the brain as the organ of both cognition and mind...loneliness is physical. For more than 2,000 years before the development of scientific medicine, physicians had a more holistic approach to mental and physical health. *FB Alberti: Loneliness is a modern illness of the body, not just the mind.*

God's declaration that *'it is not good that man should be alone,'* has a very practical message to society today. More and more people live isolated lives, without meaningful human relationships, exacerbated by current technologies that enable one to live apart from other humans if one so wishes. (This happens even in families, where children can live entirely separate lives, eating, studying and entertaining themselves in their bedrooms with their own TVs, phones, computers, music and entertainment systems). Unfortunately, loneliness taken to extremes, results in psychopathic behaviour – most violent psychopathic behaviour is associated with 'unbearable loneliness' (to quote the experts) - we see the awful results daily in the news bulletins.

Companionship

Friendship or companionship is a wonderful blessing to man.

'It is not good that man should be alone...'

We need to study why God made this statement. There are profound truths in this statement that we should seriously think on:

By himself, man cannot reflect or be an image of the God who is three-in-one; the 3 persons who are Love, who are one in purpose. So Genesis 1:27 tells us that man and woman together reflect the image of God. *'So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.'*

"As soon as we are fully conscious we discover loneliness. We need others physically, emotionally, intellectually; we need them if we are to know anything, even ourselves." CS Lewis: *The Four Loves*.

Marriage is an exclusive relationship between a man and a woman. This relationship expands to include children and within the framework of family, children, parents and grand-parents live in relationships: maternal, paternal and filial. Within this safe space, children learn how to relate to each other and learn the values of their parents and grandparents (this inter-generational input is invaluable and regrettably has been lost to a great extent in modern society). From their family, children then learn how to relate to others outside the family circle and they also learn the importance of social relationships in life.

Friendship has no such exclusivity. People (either men or women) become companions and then friends as they find common interests.

Within our community we must have the heart and spirit of Jesus who always recognised those who were lonely in spirit. We must be willing to leave our comfort zones to help such people. If we are abiding in Christ and led by the Spirit, God will lead us to those who are in need.

Jesus was not married, but He had the heart of a true Friend. Of Christ it was said:

“The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God has opened My ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away.” Isaiah 50:4, 5

God promises that He will place the lonely in families. Are you part of a family that is willing to be used of God for this purpose?

A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families...Psalm 68:5, 6

The Unmarried Life

We have our perfect example in Jesus of the unmarried life that is a blessing to the world. Jesus gave us His reason for never feeling alone:

“And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone...” John 8:29

Every Christian, whether married or unmarried should always be God-conscious i.e. the recognition that he has been chosen and called by God and that God is always with Him.

Many Christians are afraid of not being married because of the fear of loneliness and lack of intimacy (including celibacy) that is implied if one is not married.

Nevertheless, if we choose to live by God’s Word, celibacy is the lot of the unmarried, the widowed, the divorced and the person with homosexual tendencies. This last category is very important. Heterosexual Christians have failed homosexuals who desire to become Christians (Paul converted many of them – see 1 Corinthians 6:9-11) because they expect homosexuals to practice celibacy while unmarried heterosexuals do not.

God has wonderful promises for those who are unmarried through circumstances or by choice. Doing things for others often relieves loneliness. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 7 that those who are unmarried or have no families to care for, can devote themselves to the things of God, helping fellow members who need assistance, or using the gifts the Spirit gives them for ministry in the church.

I want you to be free from the concerns of this life. An unmarried man can spend his time doing the Lord’s work and thinking how to please him. But a married man has to think about his earthly responsibilities and how to please his wife. His interests are divided. In the same way, a woman who is no longer married or has never been married can be devoted to the Lord and holy in body and in spirit. But a married woman has to think about her earthly responsibilities and how to please her husband. I am saying this for your benefit, not to place restrictions on you. I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible. 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

Those who are single need should not wallow in their aloneness. They can live rich and fulfilled lives, for God has a future and hope planned for them (Jeremiah 29:11). They can have wonderful and meaningful friendships and relationships with friends and family. They can ask God to make them a blessing to others. One of the secrets to happiness is living for others, whether we are single or married.

Conversion, not diversion or matchmaking, is the desperate need of the single person. Conversion, not diversion, must be the primary focus of church ministry to singles. Conversion, nurtured by deep spiritual and social fellowship that binds together the broken hearts we all have, must be the first priority of every pastor. *Noel Cameron: Ministering to the Unmarried*. Available at: <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1978/09/ministering-to-the-unmarried>

When a Marriage Ends

We saw in our study last week that God's plan for marriage is that should be for life. Every Christian who enters into a marriage covenant must desire to do God's will and depend on the Lord for grace to be faithful to his/her marriage vows, especially in trying circumstances, where the spouse no longer exhibits Christ-like behaviour. Such a Christian can claim the promises of God that he/she will not be alone and that God's grace is sufficient for every need.

The Bible gives only 3 circumstances in which a marriage can end:

1. Death, which is inevitable.
2. Adultery on part of a spouse. Matthew 5:32; 19:9.
3. Where an unbelieving spouse insists on leaving the believing spouse. 1 Corinthians 7:15

If we find that we have come short of God's calling to us in the above areas of life, we must by faith, believe that when we ask forgiveness, God will not turn away a contrite heart and a broken spirit. He will heal our backsliding and love us freely. John 8: 1-11 is a wonderful story of God's forgiveness.

And those of us who have been fortunate in our marriages, must not be judgmental about those who been caught up in temptation or disregarded God's will regarding divorce. Rather, we must follow the advice of Paul:

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. Galatians 6:1, 2

However, it is important to say that the church should not accept as normative (normal and permissible) the permissions that civil society allows for the dissolution of marriage. The church should always take on the role of intercessor and mediator in trying to restore a broken relationship. **We must hate the sin, but always love the sinner.**

The most wonderful blessing the lonely can enjoy is intimacy with God. Many of us who fall into the above categories want human intimacy rather than intimacy with God. But, if we are willing, He will become our Friend (Song of Solomon 5:16) our Husband (Isaiah 54:5). He looks after the widowed and forsaken spouse.

The Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God... O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires...and all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children. Isaiah 54: 6, 11, 13

He is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend. Song of Solomon 5:16

For thy Maker is your husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah 54:5

"And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord." -Hosea 2:19-20

Death and Loneliness

One of the most poignant stories in the Bible is about the death of the prophet Ezekiel's wife.

Throughout the Bible, God's people have accepted death as a consequence of sin. Though they have sorrowed, they have lived in the hope of the resurrection. They have lived lives that fulfilled God's will despite being bereaved.

Also the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, behold, I take away from you the desire of your eyes with one stroke; yet you shall neither mourn nor weep, nor shall your tears run down. Sigh in silence, make no mourning for the dead; bind your turban on your head, and put your sandals on your feet; do not cover your lips, and do not eat man's bread of sorrow." So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died; and the next morning I did as I was commanded. Ezekiel 24:15-18

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Matthew 5:4

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Revelation 21:4

Spiritually Single

God gives wonderful promises to those who feel spiritually single; who feel spiritually alone in a marriage due to an unbelieving spouse, but have decided by God's grace to remain faithful to their marriage vows:

If a fellow believer has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to continue living with him, he must not leave her. And if a believing woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to continue living with her, she must not leave him. For the believing wife brings holiness to her marriage, and the believing husband brings holiness to his marriage. Otherwise, your children would not be holy, but now they are holy. But if the husband or wife who isn't a believer insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases the believing husband or wife is no longer bound to the other, for God has called you to live in peace. Don't you wives realize that your husbands might be saved because of you? And don't you husbands realize that your wives might be saved because of you? 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 (NLT)

Conclusion:

Blessed is every Christian who recognises that his fulfilment in life (whether married or unmarried, whether single by choice or by circumstances) comes from knowing God and doing His will.

Such a Christian is never lonely. Like Jesus, he can say, "My heavenly Father is always with me". Like Jesus, he is always interested in people; so he seeks to live in relationship to others so that he can be a blessing to them. He can tell them of the gospel, he can help those who are in spiritual, social, mental, financial and physical need. In doing so, he will find that he is filled with the joy of heaven.

"When we really believe that God loves us and means to do us good we shall cease to worry about the future. We shall trust God as a child trusts a loving parent. Then our troubles and torments will disappear, for our will is swallowed up in the will of God. . . . One day alone is ours, and during this day we are to live for God. For this one day we are to place in the hand of Christ, in solemn service, all our purposes and plans, casting all our care upon Him, for He careth for us." *EGW: Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 101.*

"Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore"
Psalm 16:11
