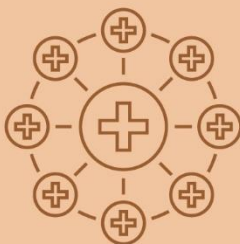




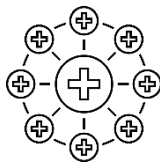
THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

YOU ARE NOT ALONE – FINDING COMMUNITY IN CHRIST



SAM ROMINE

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE
– FINDING
COMMUNITY IN
CHRIST AND HIS
PEOPLE**

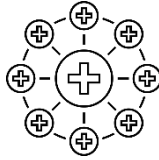


SAM ROMINE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
PART I: THE WHAT AND WHY OF LONELINESS	5
PART II: LONELINESS IN THE BIBLE.....	8
PART III: DIAGNOSING YOUR LONELINESS.....	15
PART IV: OVERCOMING LONELINESS THROUGH UNION WITH CHRIST	21
PART V: OVERCOMING LONELINESS THROUGH COMMUNITY WITH GOD'S PEOPLE.....	24
CONCLUSION: LONELINESS LOST	28

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE – FINDING COMMUNITY
IN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE**



INTRODUCTION

When you think of nationwide health epidemics, what comes to your mind? Covid-19? The Swine Flu? A measles outbreak? Well, in 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General released a report in which he categorized loneliness as a growing public health crisis. In fact, because of this advisory, many people now refer to this matter as the “loneliness epidemic.” Now, whether you agree with categorizing loneliness as an official epidemic or not, we all must admit that loneliness is a pervasive problem for people. For many individuals, the fear of being alone can intensify the emotional weight of loneliness, even when they know logically that others struggle too.

With the rise of globalization, technology, and social media, people and societies are connected like never before. And yet, people are also as lonely as ever. While studies show that Christians are less likely to experience feelings of loneliness when compared with non-Christians, the number of believers who report feeling lonely is alarmingly high, with statistics significantly rising among younger generations. As followers of Christ, we simply can no longer ignore this pressing issue. We must tackle it with Scriptural and practical wisdom. Scripture gently reminds us that you are not alone, even when emotions say otherwise. For every believer facing this struggle, God promises that you won't be alone, even if relationships feel distant or inconsistent.

1

THE WHAT AND WHY OF LONELINESS

Loneliness can be hard to identify and address. This is because its causes and effects are different for each person. I know that if I touch a poison ivy plant, by the next day, I will have itchy, red bumps all over the affected area. However, if I start to feel lonely, I may not immediately know the cause, and how and when those feelings arise may not always be the same. And so, I think it is important that we not have a simplistic view of loneliness and the ways it impacts people's lives. Even when loneliness becomes confusing or unpredictable, it is deeply reassuring to remember that you are not alone, and that God walks through every emotional valley with His children.

Now, before we look at how we should address loneliness, it would be helpful to define what loneliness is.

What is Loneliness?

Loneliness often includes a mix of several emotional experiences, even if all of them are not always present at the same time. It is entirely possible for a person to be hundreds of miles away from the next closest soul, and yet not feel the slightest bit lonely. Similarly, it is also possible for someone to be surrounded by dozens of other people at a party or event and yet feel profoundly alone. This is often where the fear of being alone becomes more emotional than physical, reminding us that loneliness is not solved by crowds but by meaningful connection.

Therefore, it is best to understand loneliness as an inner feeling of being forsaken, forgotten, or friendless. In those moments, it is spiritually comforting to remember that in Christ you are not alone, and even when

YOU ARE NOT ALONE – FINDING COMMUNITY IN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE

others cannot be present, God promises that you won't be alone now or in the future.

While not all three of these ingredients are always necessary, they often appear together when loneliness settles into a person's life. Those who are lonely often feel like others have forgotten them, that they have no friends, and ultimately, that they are entirely forsaken and abandoned. In such moments, it is comforting to remember that in Christ you are not alone, even when your emotions say otherwise.

Second, we also want to understand that loneliness isn't a static, unchanging condition. It doesn't impact every person the exact same way. Instead, loneliness is more of a spectrum. Loneliness is not a standard feeling that is always accompanied by the same symptoms in each person. Sometimes the fear of being alone makes loneliness feel heavier than it really is, because our thoughts tell us that the feeling will last forever.

While one lonely person may stay alone all day in their bedroom with their curtains closed, scrolling on social media, another lonely person may get up, go to work, and to the outside observer, seem just like everyone else. This is why it is important to remind yourself that you won't be alone, even if your daily life looks very different from someone else's.

But even more than understanding what loneliness is and how it manifests itself in different people, we must dig a little deeper to discover why so many people struggle with loneliness when the world has approximately 8 billion people living on it. Regardless of how loneliness shows up, believers can draw comfort from the truth that you are not alone, because God remains present even when relationships feel distant.

Why are People Lonely?

Like every other issue that we face in this life, the ultimate reason is sin. In Genesis 3, when Adam listened to the voice of the Serpent instead of God, humanity was forever plunged into sin and death. As a result, every person is separated from friendship and fellowship with God because every person sins.

Loneliness would not exist if sin had not entered the world. And so, from the outset of this guide, we want to attribute loneliness ultimately to the fall of man into sin.

Instead of living in perfect harmony with God and each other, we are now each born into a world where (because of our sin nature) we have disordered affections and therefore have disunity in our relationships. And just one effect of this post-fall reality is, of course, loneliness.

FIELD GUIDE

We do not (and cannot) naturally relate rightly to God, nor can we relate rightly to each other. Instead of walking in close friendship with others, showing kindness, love, and encouragement, our sin produces feelings of envy, pride, and self-centeredness. We look first to our own interests, rather than the interests of others (Phil 2:3-4). Like Adam and Eve after they sinned, we feel shame and guilt, and so we hide. We pull away from close relationships and we build up walls to show only the parts of our lives we wish others to see. These patterns often deepen the fear of being alone, convincing us that isolation is safer than vulnerability.

Now it is important to clarify that while all loneliness is ultimately the result of sin, not every occasion of feeling lonely is brought about by your own sin. Sometimes we feel lonely because we live in a world marred by sin. Sometimes, loneliness is brought about by external circumstances that are outside of your control. Even then, God's truth assures you that you are not alone, and that you won't be alone in facing these circumstances, no matter how unpredictable life may feel.

Reflection Questions:

1. How does this guide define loneliness? Is this different from your previous understanding? If yes, how so?
2. When people experience feelings of loneliness, what are some of the various ways in which they respond?
3. Ultimately, why do you think people struggle with loneliness?
4. What aspects of our modern culture may contribute to the rise in feelings of loneliness, especially among the younger generations?

2

LONELINESS IN THE BIBLE

As with all things in life, Scripture should serve as our ultimate source of truth. While we may be tempted to look for help from our favorite podcast, mid-day talk show panel, or social media trend, the Bible should always be our first and final authority. We must believe the words of David:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.

Psalm 19:7-9

With such a high view of Scripture now before us, we simply ask: What does the Bible say about loneliness? Is it a common theme? Does it often plague God's people? And how do the people of God respond when they find themselves in seasons of loneliness?

Many believers turn to bible verses about loneliness for comfort-such as Psalm 25:16, where David prays, "*Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.*" Verses like this remind us that God hears those who feel alone.

To answer this question, we will take a quick survey of Scripture, looking at loneliness in the Garden of Eden, in the writings of the psalmists, and in the lives of the prophets and beyond. What we will see is that loneliness has at least three causes. Of course, this list is not meant to be exhaustive. And yet, it does provide a summary understanding of how the Bible treats loneliness. Here are three causes of loneliness in Scripture:

- In the Garden, loneliness is brought about by *sin and shame*
- In the Psalms, loneliness is brought about by *external circumstances*
- In the Prophets and beyond, loneliness is brought about by *living for the Lord*

FIELD GUIDE

In the Garden

One of the most curious statements in the first two chapters of the Bible comes in Genesis 2:18. After God creates the sun, moon, stars, seas, plants, and animals by the power of His word, God sees that it was good. And, after God creates man, the pinnacle of His work, God sees that it was very good, which is why God's remark in Genesis 2:18 is so surprising. In contrast to the constant refrain of "it was good," God says, in verse 18, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him."

This passage functions as one of the earliest loneliness verses in the Bible, and it clearly teaches that God does not intend His image bearers to live isolated lives. Even before the fall, God's design made provision for human companionship.

Before sin has even entered the world, God notes that something is not quite right about his very good creation. The man, whom God had created in his very own image, was alone. Even after parading all of the birds and animals before the man to name, Adam was still alone. No animal could serve as a suitable helper for him. And so, God creates from Adam's own flesh the first woman, Eve. The Lord then gives this woman to Adam in marriage to be his helper as he exercises dominion over God's creation. Verses like Genesis 2:18 are a reminder for believers today that God sees our loneliness and provides what we need—we are not meant to carry isolation forever.

We want to observe that God made man for relationship. Just as the triune God has existed in perfect, eternal fellowship with himself in the persons of the Father, Son, and Spirit, so God created man to be in perfect fellowship with both himself and others. We weren't meant to be alone. Even when you are lonely or feel spiritually isolated, Scripture consistently reminds you that you are not alone. And this is where Genesis 2 ends—mankind living in perfect friendship with God and each other. But oh, how quickly things change!

As we noted earlier, sin enters the world through the rebellion of Adam and Eve. They reject God's Word, rebel against his rule, and ruin their relationship with him. They are expelled from the Garden, no longer able to walk closely with him in perfect intimacy. But in addition to this, another consequence of sin is the fracturing of fellowship between man and woman. Adam's relationship with Eve is now tainted by sin, and so will it be for all their posterity. Since then, many have experienced loneliness in a relationship—even with those closest to them.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE – FINDING COMMUNITY IN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE

I want to highlight one implication of broken relationships that is particularly important for us to understand as we consider loneliness. In Genesis 2:25, we read, “and the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” However, after they fall into sin, Adam and Eve now recognize their nakedness, and they hide from God because of their shame. Shame can make you feel lonely in a relationship, even when another person is physically present. As we consider overcoming loneliness, we must confront the power that shame often holds over us and the way it isolates our hearts from God and from others. Even when loneliness settles into relational life, God reminds His people that you are not alone, and He calls you to restoration rather than hiding.

Just as Adam and Eve hid from God because of their shame, we also hide from God because of the shame created by our sin, and more than that, we often hide from others. We feel shame over past decisions or present habits, and so we pull away from others—even from those who really love us. We are afraid that people will reject us or correct us, and so we choose not to open our lives to them. While this is effective in the sense that we can temporarily avoid our sin and shame, what we don’t see is the toll this takes on our souls. Our hearts become hardened, our eyes become blind, our consciences become seared, and our love for others grows cold.

And sooner or later, we believe the lie that we truly are alone, even though you are not alone in the eyes of God. Hiding from others will always result in feelings of loneliness and loneliness and isolation. But in this case, the wound is self-inflicted. The loneliness we now face is not the result of some external circumstance, but instead the result of our own choices.

So, what do we learn about loneliness in the Garden?

Sure, our sin and shame could be a reason to pull back, isolate, and remain unknown and alone, but it doesn’t have to be that way. In grace and mercy, God acted to deal with the shame of Adam and Eve. Their attempt to cover their own nakedness by sewing together fig leaves was futile, so God sacrificed animals and covered them with skins. This act anticipates a greater act of grace and a greater covering of shame. A few thousand years later, God would again act in mercy and grace by sending His own Son, Jesus, to be a greater sacrifice. His death on the Cross covered the sin and the shame of God’s people, those who would turn to him in faith. And because of this forgiveness, we no longer need to hide our shame. We can be open and honest with others, because the blood of Jesus not only reconciles sinners to God, but also reconciles sinners to each other in God’s family, the Church (Ephesians 2:11–22), reminding us again that

FIELD GUIDE

you are not alone, even when feelings of loneliness and isolation tempt us to believe otherwise.

In the Psalms

For generations, God's people have looked to the Psalms to stir up hope, joy, and peace in times of fear, sadness, and doubt. Perhaps unlike any other portion of Scripture, the Psalms pull back the curtain and bring us into the inner workings of the hearts of God's people as they wrestle with the various hardships and questions of life. For example:

- Why do the wicked prosper (Ps. 73)?
- Why are you cast down, O my soul (Ps. 42)?
- Why have You forsaken me (Ps. 22)?
- Where is Your steadfast love (Ps. 89)?

Questions like these are common refrains in the Psalms. The claim that God's people should always be bubbly and chipper, never frowning or having a bad day, just isn't true. It's not at all the experience of God's people as recorded in Scripture. While life with God is full of pleasure and joy, here below on earth, it is not without trial and tribulation. In these moments, Scripture quietly reassures the believer that you are not alone, even when sadness deepens.

Perhaps the novice Bible reader would be surprised to learn that King David, a man after God's own heart, wrestled with sorrow and suffering all his life. You may also be surprised to learn that King David battled loneliness. For example, in Psalm 25:16, he writes, "Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted." Or elsewhere, in Psalm 13:1, "How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?" Verses like these show how periods of sadness and loneliness were sometimes part of David's life.

Even though David was the Lord's anointed, the chosen king, this didn't mean that David never experienced feelings of loneliness and depression. At many points in his life, David felt forgotten and forsaken, and not just by others, but by the LORD Himself. And while David certainly was not perfect and even sinned greatly at times (i.e., 1 Sam. 11), at other points, David's loneliness stemmed from the outward circumstances in his life.

In fact, David spent much of his early life on the run, literally fleeing and hiding for his life. In 1 Samuel 17, David defeats Goliath, but in 1 Samuel 18, Saul begins to be jealous of the praise David receives from the people of Israel, and so he begins his quest to take David's life. This starts an eight-year period where David is not even safe in his own country. Saul sends

YOU ARE NOT ALONE – FINDING COMMUNITY IN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE

assassins to kill David, and at one point, David must live with the Philistines, but because he is afraid that they might want to kill him, he acts like an insane man to protect himself. Long story short, David is a fugitive on the run, is constantly trying to evade death, and is facing circumstance after circumstance in which he feels forgotten, forsaken, and being alone becomes part of his daily struggle.

So, what do we learn about loneliness from the Psalms, and from David's life in particular?

Sometimes, the Lord allows hardships in our lives that are beyond our control, and this can leave us feeling lonely and even wrestling with loneliness and depression. David was not exempt from suffering and sometimes doubted God's presence and faithfulness. David was unable to cultivate relationships with those whom he loved. He was unable to see his family and friends. What about you? Well, the Lord may call you to move to another city, and as a result, you may lose close friendships. God may allow the death of a loved one – a spouse, parent, child, or friend. Or maybe the Lord brings about a debilitating disease in which you must isolate from others, or which physically prevents you from getting out. What then? You must understand that not all loneliness is the result of your personal sin. Sometimes the circumstances are beyond your control, but even then, you must remember that you are not alone, because the Lord never forsakes those whom he loves.

In the Prophets and Beyond

As we close out our sweep of Scripture, we want to be aware of a third cause of loneliness: faithfully following Christ. Sometimes, we can face loneliness simply because we live for the Lord. And this is something we see happening often in Scripture.

Take, for instance, the prophet Elijah. In 1 Kings 18, we have a great confrontation between the false prophets of Baal and Elijah, the true prophet of the LORD. After Elijah defeats them, thus showing Yahweh to be the true God over and above all idols, he is forced to flee into the wilderness because the wicked Queen Jezebel seeks his life.

After spending a whole day wading into the wilderness, Elijah lies down under a tree where he wishes for his own death. Eventually, after God miraculously brings him to Mt. Horeb, Elijah expresses his belief that he is the only true prophet of the LORD left. There are no others – he is alone! But this is not the case. God reveals to Elijah that He has kept for Himself 7000 others, who refused to bow the knee to Baal.

FIELD GUIDE

What's important for us to see here is that faithfully following God does not always lead to earthly prosperity and ease. In fact, there will be times when, like Elijah, we feel alone. We feel like we have been forgotten and forsaken, and that we have no friends left.

Now, if you are thinking, "Well, that may be true for these mighty prophets of God who did these awesome deeds for the LORD, but that won't be the case for Christians today, right?" – you may want to think again.

In the Gospels (Matt. 8 and Luke 9), Jesus expresses the reality that there is a cost to following Him. While animals and birds have homes, Jesus has no place to lay his head, and the implication is that there will be sacrifices made by those who follow him, as well. In addition, faithfully following Jesus will sometimes mean losing the closest relationships you have in life. In Matthew 10, Jesus states that he has not come to bring peace, but a sword. This does not mean that Jesus wants to start armed conflicts, but that following Him will sometimes be divisive. There will be times when one must choose between a relationship with Jesus and a relationship with a close family member. And when those times come, we are called to love Jesus more than anything else.

Furthermore, we see Paul sacrifice comfort, security, and relationships in his life. As he seeks to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, Paul gives up things that many of us hold so tightly. For the sake of the good news of Jesus, Paul is willing to endure being rejected by his own people and face many hardships that could have easily resulted in his death (2 Cor. 11:23-27). Paul openly states that he faced countless beatings and many imprisonments from his service to Christ. Furthermore, he is abandoned by his ministry partner, Demas, who leaves Paul out of love for the world (2 Tim. 4:10-11), and also abandoned by many as he ministered in Asia (1 Tim. 1:15).

So, what do we learn about loneliness from the Prophets and Beyond?

Throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, we see that faithfully following the Lord often comes at a great personal cost, and sometimes, the cost is loneliness. At times, your love for Jesus will mean losing close relationships or moving halfway across the world for the sake of the Gospel. Yet here we have a positive use of loneliness – loneliness does not have to drive us to despair; it drives us to Christ. As we give up the comforts of home and the friendships of this life for the sake of Jesus, he supplies us with so much more, both in this life and in the life to come (Mark 10:29-31).

Reflection Questions:

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE – FINDING COMMUNITY
IN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE**

1. Can you think of any other causes or instances of loneliness in the Bible?
2. Why do you think it is important to understand the cause of loneliness in your life?
3. Is there a character in the Bible that you seem to resonate with as they relate to loneliness?
4. How does Scripture help you better understand your battle against loneliness?

3

DIAGNOSING YOUR LONELINESS

Now that we have defined loneliness and found it in the Bible, it's time to turn the focus to examining your own life. Let's recall our earlier definition: *loneliness is an inner feeling of being forsaken, forgotten, and friendless.*

The easy part is knowing when you feel these things. It's probably not difficult for you to realize when you feel forsaken, forgotten, and friendless. Those are each strong and powerful feelings, and people generally know when they are facing them.

What is not always easy is diagnosing the cause of these feelings. Why do I feel as if God has completely abandoned and forsaken me? Is there a reason that everyone seems to have forgotten me? Why is it that I seem to have no true friends at all in my life? As you seek to diagnose the cause of loneliness in your life, here are three questions to ask and three keys to consider.

Question #1 – Sinful, or Not Sinful?

I think the most helpful place to start in this process is by asking the question: Is your loneliness caused by your own personal sin, or by the general brokenness of a fallen world?

While this may seem like semantics, or you may be tempted to think that the cause really doesn't matter, let me show why it is of vital importance.

Consider this illustration: in the medical field, diagnoses and treatments are given that aim to address not just the symptom, but the underlying cause. If I have a cough, I could simply keep taking cough drops to feel better and hope that my cough will eventually disappear. And most likely, after a few days, it will. However, if there is a serious, underlying issue in my lungs that is causing the cough, a few lemon-honey cough drops won't heal me. Eventually, I will need to deal with the root cause of my cough. This is why a good doctor will run tests, take blood, and do whatever is necessary to ensure that he prescribes the proper treatment.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE – FINDING COMMUNITY IN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE

In the same way, as we think about treating our loneliness, we need to first understand why we are feeling lonely. It's not good enough to just realize that we do feel lonely. And ultimately, our loneliness is brought about by sin – either our own fallenness or the general fallenness of broken creation.

Question #2 – If Sinful, What is the Root?

Let's say you conclude that your loneliness is caused by your own personal sin. The work is still not done. You need to drill down even deeper to identify the specific sinful root (or roots) that is causing your loneliness.

And to help with this, here are three areas you could focus on:

First, your actions: are there specific sinful actions, behaviors, or habits that are against God's Word and will?

For example, are you secretly indulging in the consumption of pornography or other sexually illicit material? If so, this could very well be the underlying cause of your feelings of loneliness. Instead of finding pleasure and fulfillment in God-honoring, appropriate human relationships, you are substituting them for a cheap imitation. Rather than having intimacy with your spouse, you are seeking it with a screen. And as this continues, you withdraw more and more from genuine human interaction and love, pursuing those things with empty replacements.

Second, your beliefs: are there certain things you believe about God, yourself, or the world that are not true?

Here is a possible example. If you believe that your physical appearance is the most important thing about you, then how you look will dictate everything about your life. If you are not content with your weight, height, or hair, then you will not want to be around many people until you feel like your appearance is where it needs to be. Or perhaps this belief will lead you on a quest to have the perfect Instagram account, where every picture you post is exactly how you want it. After a while, this becomes an obsession, and you find yourself spending hours a day not only making sure you look good, but also comparing yourself to others. And before you know it, you are regularly spending 8 to 10 hours a day scrolling on your phone. You're not eating well, you're not sleeping well, and you are never exercising or even going outside. Well, eventually, it should come as no surprise that you start to feel lonely. And the reason is not ultimately your social media habits and screen time (although those do play a role), but your wrong belief that how you look is the most important thing about you.

FIELD GUIDE

Third, your desires: are there certain things that you desire that are out of alignment with the will of God?

It is quite possible that feelings of loneliness are caused by a sinful desire that has taken your heart captive. For example, maybe above all other things, you desire to achieve your peers' approval. Now this desire could be anything – the best GPA in your class, the most points on your team, or the highest sales quota at work. Whatever it may be, what happens when you fail? What happens when you don't achieve the thing you were after? Well, if your life revolved around this, you would be crushed, you would be angry, and you most likely would be embarrassed or ashamed. And if those emotions carry on, odds are you will pull back from the relationships in your life because you don't want to face up to the success of another or own your own failure. Before you know it, you are alone, isolated, and you feel like you have no one. The ultimate cause was your desire for praise.

Question 3 – If Not Sinful, What is the Cause?

On the other hand, let's say your own sin does not cause your loneliness. As far as you know, you are walking rightly before the Lord. Great! But still, the work is not done. You need to identify and understand the source of your loneliness.

I never met my maternal grandfather. He died before the age of 50 when my mom was still in college. He was a pastor in the Washington D.C. area and was killed in a car crash on the way home from a pastoral care visit.

My grandmother has never remarried. She has now spent more years as a widow than as a married woman. During these now 30-plus years since her husband passed away, she has struggled with loneliness. She misses him dearly and mourns the time that she will never spend with her husband and the time her children will never spend with their father. In many ways, she has wrestled with the kind of sorrow we sometimes see in loneliness in marriage after the loss of a spouse, reminding us that even after deep grief, you are not alone in your experiences-Scripture and the church testify to this.

The ultimate cause of my grandmother's loneliness was not her own personal sin. Her loneliness was brought about simply by living in a fallen world under the curse of sin-a world in which death is very real and often untimely.

I'm sure you could name countless other causes of loneliness that do not directly result from your own sinful actions, beliefs, and desires. Here are

YOU ARE NOT ALONE – FINDING COMMUNITY IN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE

just a few possible circumstances that could lead someone to experience loneliness:

- A debilitating disease in which human interaction is limited or eliminated entirely
- The loss of a loved one – a parent, children, spouse, or close friend
- Being forced to move to another state for work
- Parents are becoming empty nesters for the first time, as their kids go off to college, get married, and begin careers far away
- Getting fired from a job or cut from a team on which were all your meaningful relationships

We could go on and on with circumstance after circumstance that are beyond your control, yet bring about feelings of loneliness in your life. But the point is that not all loneliness is directly brought about by your own sin. There are things that happen in life, that happen in God's good providence, that may leave you feeling forsaken, forgotten, and friendless. A lonely wife, a grieving parent, or someone isolated by illness must remember: even when relationships are strained or absent, you are not alone in the eyes of God.

In addition to those three questions, here are three essential keys to keep in mind during this process of diagnosing your own loneliness.

Key #1 – Don't Neglect Scripture and Prayer

One of the biggest dangers in self-examination and in attempting to diagnose the sinful yearnings of our own hearts is, well, our hearts! Jeremiah describes the heart this way: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). This is not exactly a glowing review. The prophet understands that it is a delicate endeavor to attempt to understand the inner workings and desires of our hearts because they cannot be trusted. Our hearts deceive us!

So, if your heart is so sick and deceitful to the point of not being able to understand it, is self-examination not then an exercise in futility? The answer would be yes, if not for the Word of God. Scripture is the best tool you have at your disposal to help you examine and diagnose what is going on inside.

For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

FIELD GUIDE

Praise God that he has graciously given you his Word, which the Spirit uses as a sword to cut deep and reveal your true intentions, and as a mirror, to help you see the things that you would otherwise be blind to (Jas. 1:23-25).

And as you use Scripture, be sure not to neglect prayer. You must plead with God to shine the light of Scripture into the dark corners of your soul, and bring his truth to bear on your life. You must pray that God would reveal to you any hidden sins, any impure motives that would blind you from seeing the truth.

Key #2 – Involve Your Pastors and Other Christians

Far too often, we attempt to live our spiritual lives solo. But God has not saved us onto an island but into a family – the church! And so as we seek to diagnose the underlying causes of loneliness in our lives – whether they be sinful or not – we would be foolish not to enlist the help of our pastors and other brothers and sisters in Christ.

One of the most neglected means of God's grace in the lives of many Christians is their local church. It is here where you should actually be known the best, and where God has ordained for your spiritual growth to take place alongside others. The local church has the language and framework to help you understand who you are and what you need. Furthermore, it is among these people that God has ordained for your growth and maturity to take place (Eph. 4:11-16). Don't neglect the wisdom of other believers who love you and pastors who are called to care for you (Heb. 13:17).

Key #3 – Prepare for Rough Edges to be Revealed

In Luke 14, Jesus addresses the large crowds who have been following him, and surprisingly, doesn't give a long speech that tickles ears so that they stay, but rather, gives a strong warning which may cause many to leave. In verse 28, Jesus gives the analogy of a builder who plans to construct a tower. Before the actual construction begins, it would be wise for the builder to sit down and ensure that he has all that he needs to complete the project. Otherwise, he would look very foolish if he built half of the tower, but then ran out of materials.

Similarly, Jesus urges the crowds to first count the cost before deciding to follow him. To follow Jesus, one must be willing to deny oneself and give up everything for the sake of Christ. While following him will be joyful, it won't be easy – there will be significant personal sacrifice.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE – FINDING COMMUNITY IN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE

As you sit down to evaluate your own heart, be aware that God may reveal things you would rather not see. Through the Spirit, the Lord will show you blind spots and rough edges, areas of sin and weakness that you may not have even known existed! To avoid a total shock, you must prepare beforehand and commit to facing those things with humility. You must count the cost and understand that sanctification does not come without sacrifice.

Reflection Questions:

1. What are you afraid of most in diagnosing your own loneliness?
2. Who are a few people that you could ask to help you in this process? Write down 2-3, and then go and ask them to help.
3. Do you regularly spend time reading Scripture and praying? If not, ask your pastor to help you develop a plan to regularly spend time with God.

4

OVERCOMING LONELINESS THROUGH UNION WITH CHRIST

We have finally reached the final two parts that you have been waiting for. We have defined loneliness, examined its causes, and traced it throughout Scripture, providing some questions and keys to help you diagnose the source of loneliness in your own life. In the next two parts, this guide will show you how to overcome your loneliness through Jesus and His People, Christ and His Church. Let's first look at how being united to Christ changes everything.

What is Union with Christ?

The apostle Paul describes a believer's relationship to Christ in many ways, but perhaps his favorite is simply the phrase "in Christ." While this may sound simple, nothing better captures the essence of what it means for a person to be a Christian.

When God calls a person to himself, they are forever united to Jesus. They are no longer dead in their sins, but alive in Christ. They are born again. Formally, they were dead in sin under Adam, but now they have justification and life through Christ (Rom. 5:12-21). Simply put, when a sinner repents from their sin and believes in Jesus, they are united to Jesus forever.

While that is amazing news, you may still wonder – how does this help me in my fight against loneliness? Great question! Here are three ways that correspond to our three-part definition of loneliness.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE – FINDING COMMUNITY IN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE

In Christ You are Never Forsaken

One of the strongest ways loneliness expresses itself is through the feeling of being forsaken - feeling like everyone, including God, has totally abandoned you. While I cannot promise you that you will never be abandoned by others, I can promise you that if you are in Christ, God has promised never to forsake you.

In the Old Testament, God promised that he would never abandon his people. Ultimately, these promises find their fulfillment in Christ. God did abandon Jesus's soul to the grave (Acts 2:27; Ps. 16:10) but raised him from the dead in power. Paul also reminds the Corinthians that all the promises of God find their "yes" and "amen" in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). Specifically, Hebrews 13:5-6 applies the promise that God will not forsake his people to Christians in the New Covenant.

When you are feeling lonely and feel like you are completely forsaken, remember God's promise! He did not ultimately forsake his Son to the grave, and neither does he forsake us. God will never leave you, never abandon you, and will walk faithfully with you all the days of your lives. In Christ, you are never truly alone.

In Christ, You are Never Forgotten

Another powerful way in which loneliness affects many people is through the feeling of being entirely forgotten. As a young child, my greatest fear was that my parents would forget me. I was afraid they would lose me in a grocery store, I was afraid they would leave me at home when they went out, and most of all, I was deathly afraid that they would not pick me up from school. Now this last fear was completely irrational (my mom was a teacher at the very school I attended), yet during my younger elementary school years, it was a regular problem. I vividly remember a day in the third grade when I was crying my eyes out because I was sure that no one was coming to get me.

As we stood around in the classroom waiting for the day to end, an older student dropped off a note from my mom. And in that note, my mom wrote down a few lyrics from a TobyMac song that I loved, which said this: "Just turn around, and I'll be there, I'm moving into your atmosphere." Looking back, a couple of things come to mind. First, I have not listened to TobyMac in years! Second, that note meant the world to me. My mom was not physically present, but her words gave me the peace and assurance I needed, knowing she would come get me when the day was over. I was her son – how could she ever forget?

FIELD GUIDE

The same is true of every believer. Through faith, we are all adopted by God as sons and daughters. And as your perfect heavenly Father, his steadfast love for you will never fail, and you will surely never be forgotten, not because you are so inherently lovable, but because you are loved in the Beloved.

In Christ, You are Never Friendless

One of the worst aspects of struggling with loneliness is the feeling that you have no friends in the world. And to some degree, all people have experienced this. Perhaps you recall what it's like to play alone at recess as a child. Maybe you have experienced the crushing emotion of your only friend stabbing you in the back. Or perhaps you know the gut-wrenching feeling when everyone at work gets together to hang out, while you are not invited. Whatever the circumstance is, feeling like you have no friends is devastating.

A favorite hymn for many is Joseph Scriven's What A Friend We Have In Jesus. This hymn is not just a feel-good song that says nice things. While Christ is indeed our Savior, Lord, and King, he is also our Friend. And this is one of the sweetest realities of the Gospel. In John 15:15, Jesus tells His disciples that He no longer calls them servants, but friends. This is not to say that they are no longer in his service or are now exempt from obeying his will. No, this statement is about relationship. Those who love Jesus and are loved by Jesus are his friends.

And Jesus is unlike any other friend we have ever had. He is the friend who sticks closer than a brother, and a friend who will never let us down. He will never betray us, speak ill of us, nor exchange us if someone better comes along. No, and even when we are faithless toward him, he remains faithful toward us. He opens up his heart toward us and will remain an ever-present Shepherd in the darkest moments of our lives.

Reflection Questions:

1. What does it mean to be united to Christ?
2. Have you ever thought of Jesus as your friend before? If not, what comes to mind when you do?
3. Do you really believe that God will never leave you or forsake you?

5

OVERCOMING LONELINESS THROUGH COMMUNITY WITH GOD’S PEOPLE

It should come as no surprise that in our modern, individualistic culture, we often ignore and neglect the importance of community with others. Instead of hanging out with friends, we text. Instead of playing basketball, we watch highlights on YouTube. Instead of traveling to a dream destination, we view photos of others who have ventured there. Unfortunately, this problem is not just a concern for non-Christians, but also for believers.

Instead of going to church, we watch online. Instead of asking our pastors questions about the Bible, we use ChatGPT. And instead of handling a conflict in person with our brother or sister, we post about them on Facebook.

By and large, many Christians have lost sight of the blessing of not only being united to Christ, but also united to his body, the Church. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12 that through the Spirit we were all baptized into one body and are members of one another. We need other believers, and other believers need us. And while it is true that all Christians everywhere and from all time are united in Christ, this reality is expressed in local congregations where we can love, pray for, and encourage one another in person. In truth, I believe that the greatest tool you have in overcoming your loneliness is simply belonging to a healthy church. Below, I will give three ways the local church will help you how to combat loneliness in your life and remind you that you are not alone.

FIELD GUIDE

What is a Healthy Church?

Before listing out those benefits, let me give a quick plug for finding a healthy church. I could tell you all kinds of ways a good church can help you, but if you are not in a good church and don't know what to look for, well, then those things won't be of much help.

First, find a church that simply preaches the Bible. In the age of the internet, television, and smartphones, we hear enough from the world. We don't need more of what man has to offer – we need to hear from God, and God has spoken to us in Scripture. And so find a church in which God's Word is held high, treasured, and central to everything in the life of that church. Look for the Bible to be read, preached, prayed, and sung. Studying loneliness in the Bible can be deeply comforting because Scripture assures us again and again that you are not alone, even when your emotions tell you otherwise.

Second, find a church with a high view of God. Far too common today are churches that are man-centered. But you don't need a God who only exists to meet your needs, give you what you want, and fulfil all your wildest dreams. You need a God who is exalted as holy, righteous, powerful, good, and sovereign.

Third, find a church that truly cares about membership. The church is not a social club, a movie theatre, or some sort of spiritual vending machine. It's not there to give us what we want. The church is a group of saved sinners who have committed to gather to hear God's Word preached, observe Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and to exercise loving care over each other's souls. Beware churches where you can belong before you believe, or walk in and out without anybody knowing who you are.

Outward, Not Inward

Loneliness has a funny way of making someone turn inward. Even though the lonely person often realizes that they need others, they tend to keep to themselves and become increasingly isolated. Before long, their loneliness is self-perpetuating. They focus entirely on the fact that they are alone. And the more they focus on this reality, the more they pull away from others. If you are asking what to do when lonely, this is often the first place to look: are you isolating more than you realize?

The beauty of the local church is that it has a funny way of making us turn outward. To be in covenant with other believers means to be committed to loving them, serving them, encouraging them, correcting them, and working for the advancement of the Gospel alongside them. In fact, it is

YOU ARE NOT ALONE – FINDING COMMUNITY IN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE

impossible to be a good church member and not be in purposeful relationship with others.

And so, if you are struggling with loneliness, lean into your local church! Serve wherever you can. Help wherever you can. While you may feel like a burden, I can assure you, you will not be! Your pastors will love your commitment, and if your fellow church members are truly believers, then they will love to follow Jesus with you. And the more you give, the more you will receive. And I don't at all mean this in a prosperity-Gospel sense, but in a biblical sense. You will be surprised by the close relationships and deep friendships that God will graciously provide as you love and serve your church family. In time, the Lord will use this community to remind you again and again that you are not alone, and that Scripture itself shows how to combat loneliness through fellowship, prayer, worship, and shared life with God's people.

People, Not Programs

The world is great about providing us with programs. You can find a class, an event, or a process for anything and everything. While many of these things can be fun and exciting – think an aerobics class for senior citizens, a cooking class for young professionals, or a mid-week golf league for dads – none of these is God's ultimate answer for finding community as Christians.

The Lord has chosen the local church for this purpose, and in it, we find not just programs to participate in, but people to love. While relationships grounded in common interests can be great, they don't hold a candle to relationships grounded in a common Savior. When I left home in West Virginia to attend college in Ohio and play golf, I was immediately surrounded by a dozen other guys who were passionate about the game. And as someone who grew up at a small Christian school where we didn't have a golf team, this was amazing! I finally found a group of guys who loved being on the course as much as I did, hated making bogeys as much as I did, and who rivaled me in my knowledge of Tiger Woods.

Yet as much as I had in common with those guys, unless they knew Christ, our relationship could only go so far. And while I am still close to many of those guys, the friendships that I cherish the most are with other Christians who may not share my passion for golf, but have the same Savior.

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you can never have close friendships in your church because the people there don't share your same worldly interests. If they love Christ and cherish his Word, you have all you need for a friendship that will last a lifetime.

FIELD GUIDE

Singing, Not Silence

As I thought about the many benefits the church offers to those struggling with loneliness, numerous thoughts came to mind. But as I was talking to a close brother and fellow church member about the ways in which he finds the local church so encouraging, he said something that I would have never thought to include, but it was such a good answer.

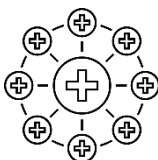
He told me that one of the most encouraging things to him is hearing other brothers and sisters sing praises to God on the Lord's Day. If loneliness often means a life of silence and solitude, what could be a better remedy than singing praises to your Savior while surrounded by other believers? To proclaim in song the steadfast love of the Lord, his amazing grace, and his awesome power. To revel in the blood of Jesus that redeems us, and cherish the faithfulness and mercy of God, which comes new to us each morning.

If you are battling against loneliness and often find yourself alone and isolated with your own thoughts, sing to the Lord! Sing alone, sing in the car, and above all, sing surrounded by others in your church. And by the way, this is our destiny. One day, we will be surrounded by people from every tribe, tongue, and nation, before the throne of God, and we will sing praises to Him forever and ever. Why not join in this song now?

Reflection Questions:

1. What do you value most in a local church? Why?
2. How can you practically pursue relationships with other believers in your church right now?
3. Why is friendship with other Christians such an important part of our lives as believers?

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE – FINDING COMMUNITY
IN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE**



CONCLUSION: LONELINESS LOST

While your union with Christ and community with other Christians will go a long way in helping you overcome loneliness, this feeling of loneliness will never be fully eradicated in this life. You see, we were made to know and love our Creator, and to live in perfect fellowship with Him in a perfect creation. But that is not yet our reality. While the Kingdom has dawned in Christ, it has not yet been fully realized.

I truly pray that you will overcome your loneliness by the grace of God. But as you battle against it, perhaps you will realize that, disguised in this suffering, there could also be a blessing. Even if you are feeling lonely in a relationship or in seasons where friendships are distant, you can cling to God's promise that you are not alone, and that He is near to the brokenhearted.

Scripture offers many bible verses about being alone, not to shame us for our weakness, but to remind us that loneliness will not last forever. These passages encourage us to hope in the Lord, knowing that every moment of isolation now prepares us to treasure perfect fellowship later.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be their God.'

Revelation 21:1-3



Sam Romine is the lead pastor at Redemption Church in Johnstown, OH, where he lives with his wife and their two children.

