

## **Loneliness Part 2 – July 13<sup>th</sup> - What causes loneliness – (CWP - Next Gen)**

**Good morning!** Before we get started, last week I gave an update on Care Ministry, and this last week, many of you stepped up and gave generously. We received 11 mattresses and a ton of clothing and other stuff, so much that the room we made was entirely full! Because of your generosity, we can use it to bless others in our church and community! THANK YOU, CHURCH for answering the call!

**RECAP-** We are in Part 2 of a mini-series on Loneliness, and last week I gave a brief introduction to the topic. Today we are looking at what causes loneliness, and next week I am not here, Eric K will be preaching, and I will be back on July 27<sup>th</sup>, and we will wrap it up by talking about how to overcome loneliness! **Loneliness is not simply being alone, but feeling emotionally isolated even if you are in a crowd of people.** We also talked about the negative effects that loneliness has on our lives, both physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and if left unchecked, how it can even affect our health. But the good news is that our battle with loneliness is not one we have to win alone; Jesus gave us the ultimate gift through the cross when **He died on it and gave us the Holy Spirit so that we can be in relationship with Him and others around us.** This morning, we are going to look at what causes loneliness in our lives.

### **A. What causes loneliness?**

This can be difficult to put your finger on, because it's an emotional response to something that is going on the inside of us, and for some, loneliness is very apparent, and believe it or not, to others, they have no idea that they are even lonely. They simply feel unseen or alienated or like an oddball out. Either way, **I believe it is important to see what tactics the enemy will use against us to cause separation and division.**

1. **Culture** plays a big part in loneliness. This morning, we prayed for the Next Generation, and I love that we are actively praying for them. And I think it's appropriate and necessary that we take a minute to look into the effects of loneliness on this next generation coming up, because culture has had a big impact on them. **They say we are now the most connected society that has ever been, but for some reason, we are also the loneliest society that has ever existed.** Why? Because loneliness is not solved by being with people around you, the problem lies within where we are surrounded, but still feel alone anyway. We are all connected with hundreds of friends at our fingertips, yet when we are in distress or in trouble, who from those “online” people are here to help one another?

There was a major shift in our culture in 2007 when the iPhone was invented, in 2009 the like button was released, and in 2010 the front-facing camera was released. Look at this graph here, this is to shows how social media has grown over the last couple of years, specifically after 2010. Here we see a huge spike in people

using social media. What's scary is that we see that anxiety and depression also started getting higher around the same time in teens and adults, and look at this graph side by side... I also read in an article by Jonathan Haight that the average daily usage is 2 hours and 30 minutes while doing an average of 20 minutes of face-to-face time. Now I do not understand all the psychology behind it, and I am sure people smarter than me have written books on it, but here's the thing. **Entering a digital friendship has a very easy, low bar to initiate and maintain...** And to end that relationship is as easy as clicking a button to end it or to "cancel" one another. Unlike the digital world, the real world has a higher bar to enter and end relationships, and we are trying to superimpose the digital one. The problem is we are not living in a digital world, and we forget things like how to communicate properly, looking at body language, waiting, and listening to understand what the other person is saying, instead of just trying to be understood. **Proverbs 18:2 Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions.** I want to tattoo this on my forehead so that when people talk to me, they can see it and hopefully take a moment to rethink what they are going to say!

Back in the old times, almost everyone lived in villages or on farms, and most people lived and died within a 20-mile radius. When you were in a village and you did not get along with someone, you could not "cancel them". You know why, because they might be the only ones selling milk or eggs.... So you learned social skills and got along with people even if you had differences! In modern times, we have bigger garages that stand out the front of our homes and fewer front porches. Everything is delivered to us these days, and even take-out food, groceries, and even movie nights can be done now without being in the same space, and when we do go out, most of us have our faces on our phones and we do not see others around us. **We have a culture now that is all about privacy, convenience, and comfort, which are not wrong, but when we prioritize them over other important areas of our lives, it's a breeding ground for loneliness.** Now, not all digital devices and services are evil! Many of these services help lots of people when they are sick or not mobile, and it's not bad to use them. I understand that some friends and family live far away and that it's a great way to spend time with them. The issue again comes when we prioritize comfort, privacy, and convenience over other people! **2 Timothy 3:1-5 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.** Now we can argue that culture is not the root, but it's the fruit of our own greed, pride and selfishness and so much more, but let's take a look at ....

2. **Selfishness** is so apparent in our culture, right? It's everywhere, we deserve better, and my rights should get me this... BUT this passage is not just about our culture, it's about the church. **When culture infiltrates the church to such a degree that we cannot tell Christians from Unbelievers....** WE HAVE A PROBLEM! And it's not just a loneliness problem, we have a holiness problem! It's a problem when we go into public and we cannot tell who's a Christian and who is not by how we treat one another or even in our driving.

**STORY-** Back in 2000, when I was diagnosed with Stage 4 Hodgkin's, we were part of a small church, and I was finishing my senior year of High School, and this was my first week home from the hospital. I was in ROUGH shape and lying in bed in the hospital, and now at home, I was feeling lonely. The thing is, when you are very sick, people do not know what to do or what to say, and that's OK!! Because that's not normal, right... Well, one of my new friends from High School came down one night and brought over this massive board game for me to play with him. He brought 2 armies, some terrain, and a few rule books he picked up from the local comic bookstore to come and read me all the different options and back stories. It was amazing, he went above and beyond, eh, what an awesome Christian friend.... Well, here is the catch: he was not a Christian, in fact, he was an atheist, but I have seldom felt a love like that in my life, by that one action he did for me. The church we belonged to never came out, and I do not blame them for it, I get it, but the atheist came... So yeah, we have a problem that we cannot tell the Christian apart from the non-believer, but we have a bigger problem when the non-believer outshines the Christian in love.

**John 13:35** By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." We are supposed to love one another to a degree that the world notices us!!! We as believers are supposed to love to such a degree that they would say it's impossible... Some will object and say, you have no idea what they did to me....

**Luke 6:32-35** "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. We have been charged with a higher calling because we are followers of Christ. Anyone can love those who love them, but we love those who are hard to love. **When we focus on ourselves, we do not have the time or energy to focus on others.** This is a breeding ground for loneliness when we stop looking at others and are focused only on ourselves. **Philippians 2:3** Do nothing out of selfish

ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves. When we start to value others more than ourselves, this does 2 things automatically. One, others will feel seen, and two, you will feel more complete. It's WIN WIN.... But I get it, some of us are cautious to even try this because we have been hurt, and if we never dealt with that hurt, we can be dealing with some bitterness or unforgiveness in our lives...

3. **Unforgiveness** has caused so much chaos and broken relationships, and I believe from what I have seen, it's the frontrunner in what causes loneliness today in our church and society. **When someone holds onto unforgiveness, they often experience negative emotions like anger, resentment, and bitterness, which can act as barriers to forming and maintaining healthy relationships. This will lead to isolation, and this isolation, in turn, will increase feelings of loneliness.** Unforgiveness will eventually lead to more conflict, strained communication, and a lack of trust, and when we stop trusting those around us, it will also grow our loneliness. Ultimately, loneliness will harden our hearts as we become bitter and cold towards others. **Ephesians 4:32 - Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.** So, forgiveness has many benefits, but in the end, we have to look at scripture and recognize that it's a command for us. **Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.** Unforgiveness for Christians is not really an option; the very nature of our faith is that we were forgiven and we are to forgive others as well.

Let me ask you here this morning, "How many of you have been hurt by someone?" OK, "How many of you know a bitter person?" OK, "How many of you like hanging out with a bitter person?" OK... So we all have been hurt, and Jesus' command to us here in Matthew is that we need to forgive is applicable to all of us! We ALL MUST forgive, and that includes knowing HOW to forgive because chances are someone is going to hurt us again, and we need to do it again. Peter asked this very question in **Matthew 18:21-22. Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. WOW!!!** That's a lot, and would we not forgive others, because one, it's hard, but also because we have all hurt others too! So, how do we forgive others? This can be very complex in many situations and I want to encourage you that if this is something that you struggle with to come and make an appointment to pray with one of our Personal Prayer Ministers or if you really want to invest, join Path to Freedom, I am going to give you a small part from Path to Freedom this morning and show you 9 steps that you can work on. Please understand **forgiveness is a process of actions, it's not an event!**

The 9 different actions do have an order, some harder than others, but it's not necessarily a check the box and move on; some you will have to come back to and keep working on them. Are you ready? Let's go!

**1) Ask the Lord to forgive you for not forgiving as He forgave you.**

**Colossians 3:13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.** We cannot make up excuses anymore! No excuses! We need to repent for violating one of God's commands. Pride is one thing that can keep many from forgiving another, but sometimes it is also not knowing what forgiveness really is. Forgiveness is NOT saying that it is OK, but this is the starting point for us.

**2) Stop rehearsing the wrong done to you and punishing the offender.**

People can easily stay stuck in offense because they continually replay the situation in their minds, or they continue to talk to others about it without seeking a resolution for what happened. When we do this, the offense will continue to grow in our hearts, and it will become worse over time to the point where we even add small details that were never there in the first place. WHEN someone has hurt us and we enter that place where our minds start to rehearse what happened, it's important to quickly go to this next step.

**3) Write down what happened that caused the offense & how it made you feel.**

Scripture teaches us that we must forgive from the heart. In order to forgive from our hearts, we need to acknowledge the pain and how our heart feels.

**Proverbs 4:23-24 Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Keep your mouth free of perversity; Keep corrupt talk far from your lips.**

For healing to take place, we must process the emotions of the event. If we cannot process our feelings, we will find that despite our best efforts to forgive, we will continuously get stuck in the offense every time it is brought up or we are triggered or we see that person again.

**4) Listen for what God wants to say to you about the offender.**

When someone has hurt or offended us, it's so hard to have empathy for them, to love them, and to forgive them. That's why it's critical to bring our pain to Jesus and process it with Him. When we do this, we can ask Jesus how He sees the offender. When we see them through Jesus' eyes, it becomes easier to forgive.

**Romans 8:34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died —more than that, who was raised to life —is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.** We can access something very unique and powerful.

When we ask Jesus how He is interceding for the one who hurt us, we can then join Him and see how Jesus sees them.

**5) Ask Him if there is anything you did to contribute to this situation.**

Maybe there wasn't anything you did to contribute, maybe there was. It may not have been much, and what was done to you may have been out of proportion to

what you did, but still, even if it's small, own it! Take responsibility for what you did, and confess it.

**6) Ask God what He wants to say to you personally about what YOU have been forgiven for.**

This is a great exercise, especially when forgiving others for big offenses. It is important that we remember that we, too, are sinners and the punishment that was due to us was death, and that Jesus paid that debt for us all. When we take the time to reflect on our own mistakes and how we were forgiven, it should get easier to forgive others, even for bigger offenses. Those who have been forgiven much, love much; those who have been forgiven little, love little.

**7) Listen for how the Lord turned what was intended for evil into something good.**

An important step when dealing with offenses and hurts, especially the larger situations, is to get God's heart of what He wants to use the situation for in our lives. **Genesis 50:20a** *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.* God is the master of using all things to equip us. As He redeems them, He uses us to advance His Kingdom. Jesus takes the ashes in our lives and turns them into something beautiful, and this is something that others will take note. There is so much that Jesus wants to accomplish in and through our struggles when we allow Him to speak divine words of faith and bring healing into our lives.

**8) Pray for the offender.**

**Luke 6:27-28** *"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."*

What should you pray for? Exactly what you would pray for yourself. What is it that you desire? Pray that daily for them. When you practice praying daily for the offender, God will release you more and give you more ideas on how to pray for them, and this is a big sign that you are advancing in forgiving the offender and healing yourself.

**9) Bless and do good to your offender.**

**Luke 6:27-28** *"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."* There are three key things listed here that we are instructed to do for our enemies:

\* Do good to them

\* Bless them

\* Pray for them

Do not wait for feelings of forgiveness. God will give these to you in His time. He has called us to DO the right thing, and the feelings will come later. Please note that forgiveness is not the same as trust. Trust must be earned, while forgiveness is freely given. Holding onto offense and hurt is at the root of many people's bondages and struggles, including loneliness. When we do not forgive, we choose to hold onto our pain, and it will only grow bigger over time.

Forgiveness, then, is a path towards healing that battles loneliness, and when we can see each other as Jesus sees us, forgive and love as He does, then we can truly defeat one of the biggest causes of loneliness in our culture today.

**B. Closing – Choose to fight Loneliness**

Knowing the causes of loneliness is good, and there are many more causes out there, as I said earlier. The 3 I highlighted this morning are simply the ones I see often, but other causes can be things like Fear, Shame, and Insecurity, to name a few. Now that you know a couple, and even if you do not struggle with loneliness, these are areas as Christians that we need to be fighting. This last week, as I read through John chapters 14-17, there was a passage in chapter 16 that really stood out to me. **John 16:32-33 Behold, the time is coming, yes, and has now come, that you will be scattered, everyone to his own place, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have oppression; but cheer up! I have overcome the world.** Jesus has overcome the world! He has overcome loneliness and He has given us tools, and He has given us each other to overcome these issues. This morning, though, as we finish up, let me leave you with these 3 questions:

- i. **Culture** – Are you prioritizing privacy, convenience, and comfort over others?
- ii. **Selfishness** – How can you start to love others around you?
- iii. **Unforgiveness** – Who do you need to forgive? What is your next step?

Let me encourage you again, do not attempt to do this alone. Can you do it alone, sure you can, but try to work through these with someone else. There is an **Old African saying- *If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together!*** BUT WAIT, you just talked about loneliness, and now I need to find someone? In 2 weeks, we will conclude and I will show you some ways in which we can overcome loneliness and some strategies involved with it, but another next step that you can start to do is to ask for prayer right here this morning in the prayer room. OR you can make an appointment with one of our Personal Prayer Ministers, and in September, we will start with Parth to Freedom again. One lady at the end of our last night told me this. We came as strangers, but we left as friends. - **PRAY**