

- out TV?
5. Can you think of any instruction given in the Bible that applies to your television viewing? Try to come up with several.
 6. Could watching TV ever be considered a sin? When?
 7. How can a person set guidelines for his own viewing? Write three rules that you think would be generally helpful for everyone.
 8. Think of some better ways you could use your time and money. For example, instead of going to the movies, you could set aside the money for the churches in Africa.

REFLECTION & PRAYER



Sing hymn 388: Near to the Heart of God.

"But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all your works" Ps 73:28.

Lord, we ask You to help us make wise choices that protect us. May Your thoughts and attitudes be ours and may we always be close to Your heart so that we can view things the way you view them. Grant us eyes so that we can clearly discern between what is right and wrong, what is good and evil, and what You take pleasure in.

Lesson 10

Loneliness

Listed Scriptures

Lk 22:39-46; Gen 28:11-22; 32:22-30; Ps 66:17-20; Is 49:15f; Heb 13:5

Lesson Aim

- 1) To understand what causes loneliness.
- 2) To remember that God is our friend and constant companion.
- 3) To learn to find strength and comfort in the words of God.
- 4) To find ways to help our friends and church members who are suffering from loneliness.

Memory Verse

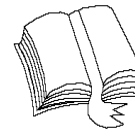
"Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you." (Deut 31:6)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Joel 2-Amos 1

BIBLE BACKGROUND

There is no Bible Background information for this lesson.





Share the following famous quotations with your students. (You can write these up on the board beforehand.)

“It is strange to be known so universally and yet be so lonely.” (Albert Einstein)

“We are born into a world where alienation awaits us.” (Ronald Liang)

“Loneliness affects some people all the time and all people some of the time.” (Kevin Flannagan)

“Loneliness is the greatest problem facing humanity today.” (Billy Graham)

Ask, “Do you agree with these quotations? (Give them time to answer). Loneliness is in fact a universal condition.”

Then, write the words “Lonely” and “Alone” on the board. Ask your students to discuss the meaning of these two words with their partners. Ask them if loneliness equates to being alone. Why or why not?

Being alone does not equate to being lonely. Loneliness is when we are forced to be alone. It is painful and unpleasant. Loneliness, like depression, is one of the plagues of modern day society. On the other hand, solitude or aloneness is a voluntary act of withdrawal from other people. It can be refreshing, rejuvenating and enjoyable.

Today we are going to look into the causes of loneliness and how, as Christians, we can overcome them and support those who are feeling lonely.



Part 1

What Does the Bible Say About Loneliness?

Loneliness is a painful awareness that we lack close and meaningful contact with others. When we are lonely, we have a feeling of inner emptiness, isolation, and intense longing. Even when surrounded by others, lonely people often feel left out, unwanted, rejected, or misunderstood. They will feel frustrated, a sense of hopelessness and unable to initiate, continue, or experience a close relationship.

In addition, loneliness is a feeling of alienation—alienation from God and alienation from other people. It can be defined on two levels:

1. Human or Emotional Level—This is between you and others.
2. Spiritual Level—This is between you and God. Sometimes when you try to pursue spiritual advancement and the people who surround you are not spiritual, then you will spiritually feel very lonely. Often this sense of isolation is felt when the person is separated from God and feels that life has no meaning or purpose. You need encouragement but no one can encourage you. You feel spiritually alone and no one understands you. That type of spiritual loneliness is not good and may eventually lead to the backsliding of your faith.

In our spiritual lives, we can be alone, but we should not have the feeling of loneliness. Jesus Christ mingled with a lot of people during the day, but in the evening, He withdrew Himself to be alone to communicate with God (Lk 5:15f). When He withdrew, He was alone, but not lonely.

Our Lord God knew that human beings need other human beings for moral support. That was why He created Eve, because “It is not good that man should be alone” (Gen 2:18). Indeed, Adam and Eve were not alone because they had fellowship with God and with each other. However, when they fell into sin, they were separated from God. Interpersonal tension came into their relationship along with the feeling of loneliness.

Feelings of loneliness were also evident in the lives of Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Job, Nehemiah, Elijah, and Jeremiah. In Psalm 142 King David wrote about his loneliness in the cave. However, instead of just talking about it, he used it to connect to

God. He also mentioned, “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me” (Ps 27:10).

Likewise, our Lord Jesus also experienced loneliness in the Garden of Gethsemane. The pain and anguish He suffered was evident through His earnest prayers. He was only able to overcome this pain and loneliness through the Father’s help—an angel appeared and strengthened Him (Lk 22:41–44; Mt 26:36–45).

The solution for loneliness as seen from the Scriptures is to have a growing relationship with God and with others. That is, loneliness will only disappear when we have communion with God and we learn to love, help, care, forgive and encourage one another. In actuality the two sides of loneliness—emotional and spiritual—are interrelated. If we have a good relationship with God, we will naturally have good relationships with others and will not emotionally feel lonely. When we feel lonely it is often a reflection of our interpersonal relationship problems as well as problems in our relationship with God. Remember that God will never forget us (Is 49:15f).



Part 2

Causes of Loneliness

Loneliness has been described as one of the world’s most common health problems. It is a painful inner emptiness that may flee after a few minutes or persist for a lifetime. It affects people of all ages, but soars during the teenage years and reaches its highest peak in people between ages eighteen and twenty-five. Loneliness occurs most often in societies that emphasize individualism. We may be surrounded by a lot of people but will still feel lonely. Loneliness cannot be overcome when we mingle with others. So, what are the causes of loneliness?



A. Lack of Friendship and Support (Ecc 4:9-12)

We will be lonely if we do not have friends. If we have good friends, we will want to share things with them. Consequently, we will feel satisfied and loved. However, if no one shares good things with us, our feelings are very different.

Once, a pastor was in Ghana and he invited a full-time worker to go out to have

some fried chicken with him. While he was eating, the pastor looked at the worker and realized that one of his pieces of chicken was missing. He noticed that this worker ate one of the pieces of chicken and wrapped the other one up to take back to church so that he could give it to his co-worker. This worker could have eaten both pieces and told his co-worker back at church how delicious it was. Instead, he kept one for him so that his co-worker could also enjoy it. Loving others makes us joyful! If we are alone, we cannot share things with others. If we are alone and we fall, no one can lift us up.

Moreover, if we marry a non-believer, we will feel very lonely spiritually because there is no one to encourage us. Being lonely in our spiritual journey can be fatal to our faith. As it says in Ecclesiastes 4:10, “But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.”

Likewise, when we make a decision to move somewhere, we must think about our spirituality. If we move to a place where there is neither church nor members, we may feel lonely and our faith will eventually grow cold. There was a brother who was very fervent back in his home country. He was an R.E. teacher and the youth coordinator. However, once he moved to the United States, he only attended services about three times in the course of twenty years because there was no church in the area. Inevitably, his faith became cold. But the Lord was merciful and called him back by allowing his daughter to suffer from an illness. The brother realized that God was calling him so he brought his whole family to church. During baptism, his daughter saw the blood of Jesus Christ and she was cured. If God did not call him back, the whole family might have been lost.

“Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecc 4:12). When we are choosing which college to go to, it is best to look for a school close to church or where there are already members. If we choose a school where there is no church or members nearby, it could be fatal to our relationship with God. We need support—emotionally and spiritually.



B. Missing Someone

Genesis 41:50-52 records how Joseph had two sons in Egypt. He named his first son Manasseh, “For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house.” The name reflected Joseph’s feelings—he suffered a lot during his years and also missed his family immensely. From the age of 17 he was sold to Egypt by his brothers and was unable to see his loving father. That type of rejection, betrayal and

loneliness he felt were almost unbearable. However, the Lord made him forget it all and blessed him greatly.

Likewise, when we miss someone, we feel very lonely. But we can turn this negative situation into something positive. There was a member who studied in a school far from church. He and his wife initiated Bible study and invited a friend. That brother studied in the school for four years and brought three families to believe in Christ. These four families now have family service together. Thus, if we miss our family and friends, we can initiate something. We can go out and evangelize and bring others to Christ. That way, we are channeling our energy into serving God and turning our loneliness into something positive.

C. Feeling Rejected or Abused

When we are rejected by friends or family, we will feel the weight of the world upon us. We might begin to isolate ourselves because we think that no one wants us. It becomes easier to be on our own than to face others. Then feelings of loneliness will set in and it is a difficult hole to climb out of. Sometimes we might be rejected because people don't like the way we are or because they don't understand us. Sometimes it is possible that we have done something that gives others reason to avoid us.

Jesus Christ was someone who was rejected by the people in His hometown. It would have been very easy for the Lord to feel dejected and just give up His work. He could have chosen to go into the wilderness and be on His own. Yet, it was at these very times that He would be even stronger in prayer and rely on God more to help Him overcome these feelings. At times when we feel others don't understand us or reject us because they don't accept who we are, we can pray to God to help others know us better so that communication can bring everyone to a better understanding.

Sometimes we may be rejected because we have done something wrong. If others have reason to avoid us, then we need to show them a new and changed person. Because Paul had persecuted the Christians in the past, no one wanted to be near him immediately after he was converted. And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe he was a disciple. (Acts 9:26) The people did not trust him. He could have given up and isolated himself from the Christian community. After all, he was doing the right thing, yet no one accepted him. But he kept up his work and used his life as living proof. Over time, his actions and words proved that he was a true apostle of Christ.

Loneliness can also come about when we are abused, physically or emotionally. When it does occur, it is very difficult to convince ourselves that we are worthy and of value. When Tamar was raped by her half-brother, the Bible records that she remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house. (2 Sam 13:20) We tend to keep to ourselves because it doesn't give others the opportunity to abuse us even more, by mocking or hurting us. But we don't want to become desolate. It is not God's intention for us. Although Absalom went about it the wrong way, he was in essence showing support for his sister. When we can openly discuss our feelings, we can become stronger. Then loneliness will not have the chance to settle in and take over our lives.

D. Separation From Our Heavenly Father

"Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit" (Ps 51:9–12). In these verses David confesses his sins before God. He understood the impact of being separated from God because of sin. That was why he asked God to restore to him the joy of His salvation because loneliness is also a feeling of emptiness, of not being spiritually satisfied. They are interrelated. If we are not fulfilled, we will feel empty within.

Jesus Christ also endured suffering on the cross—physical, emotional, and spiritual. The most unbearable, however, was spiritual suffering: He was lonely because He was abandoned by God. That was why He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me" (Mt 27:46). This type of spiritual separation from the heavenly Father was indeed very painful.

There is a testimony of a brother who had committed some sins. One day, he came back to the dorm to pray and realized that the precious Holy Spirit that he had was gone. He was so scared and felt that God had abandoned him. He felt unsafe even driving. His roommate invited him to fast and pray together for three days and nights. During the prayers, this brother was determined to live a holy life. On the third day, God gave him the Holy Spirit again. He vowed never to do anything unholy from then on because the spiritual loneliness he experienced was horrendous. From this we can clearly see that loneliness often comes because sin has alienated us from God and from one another. We need to examine ourselves to see whether sin is separating us from the heavenly Father because when God is ignored and sin is not confessed, loneliness is likely to persist (Is 1:15–20; 59:2).



Part 3

The Effects of Loneliness

The most obvious indication of loneliness is isolation from other people. However, there are other effects of loneliness.



A. Low Self-Esteem

When we are lonely, we will experience feelings of worthlessness and the inability to relate to others. It may also result in withdrawal into a self-centered thinking, a belief that nobody understands us. This in turn will result in complete withdrawal and cutting oneself off from society. This is dangerous.

There was a youth who did not go to school for a few months. He felt extremely lonely so he started to play games on the Internet until 4 a.m., as a way to numb the pain of loneliness. Because of his addiction, he was unable to get himself up in time for school. And because he could not go to school, he did not have any friends. So he withdrew himself and played on the Internet all day. He could not get himself out of this vicious cycle.

Low self-esteem arises as a result of not being in touch with others or with God. We must remember that withdrawing into ourselves will only increase our feelings of low self-esteem. Instead, we must remain positive and remember that "our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor 3:5). Don't forget that we are not alone, for the Scriptures advise us that the Lord understands our sorrow and our heartache. We must trust and believe in Him, pour out our hearts to Him for He has "put [your] tears into [His] bottle" (Ps 56:8).



B. Depression

Lonely people sometimes have a hopelessness that can lead to despair and even thoughts of suicide. When loneliness is too great, it leads to depression and suicide becomes a way out.

In the United States, children are experiencing high levels of loneliness. Many of their parents are devoted to their careers and their children have no one to relate to. Consequently, they turn to TV, and are obsessed with entertainment and the Internet. But deep down in their hearts, they are very lonely and depressed.

It seems that we are living in a generation of loneliness and famine. "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord God, "That I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). Here, the Lord states the signs of loneliness. The famine on the land—bread and water—refers to material satisfaction. In this generation we have a lot of material enjoyment but our inner hearts are not fulfilled. When we watch too much TV, it is difficult to develop proper interpersonal relationships because we are waiting for the stimulation to come in order for us to react. Once we watch TV for too long it becomes a pattern and will become passive. If we cultivate a habit of relating to TV, we will find it difficult to relate to God or to others. That is why in Amos it says that the famine is coming to the world. It is not because of entertainment but because we are lonely and are not satisfied. We lack interpersonal relationships between God and men.



C. Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (Prov 20:1; 23:29-33; Is 5:11)

Alcohol and drugs are commonly used by many as a means to escape. Some turn to these in an attempt to find friends or to numb the pain of being alone. The Bible clearly tells us that turning to such substances is wrong: "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Rom 13:14; Eph 5:18).



D. Sex and Violence (Gal 5:19-21; Prov 6:16;16:29; 1 Cor 16:15f)

Others express their frustration of loneliness through forging sexual relationships with others or displaying violent outbursts. Remember this: "The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; he who keeps his ways preserves his soul" (Prov 16:17).



Part 4

Overcoming Loneliness



A. Reach Our Hand to Love Someone (1 Jn 4:7-13)

If we do not love others, we will feel lonely. As the Lord Jesus commands us, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:39). When we have God's love in us, we will want to share that love with others and we will never feel lonely. When we live in love and do all things in love, we will never despair and fall into loneliness.

When Peter was weary in his faith, he denied the Lord three times. One reason for this denial was that he was alone in a harsh environment. When we feel weariness in our faith, do we feel lonely? Do we have a spiritual partner, someone whom we can reach out to? Make sure we do have spiritual friends because establishing caring relationships with others will help remove loneliness.

B. Communicate (Phil 2:1f)

Not only do we have to reach out to others, we must also be willing to open up and have someone whom we can seriously have heart-to-heart communications with so that we will not feel lonely. If we hide ourselves and do not open up to others, we will experience how painful loneliness can be. When we avoid relationships with others, loneliness is intensified. Develop a lifestyle of keeping in touch. Call a friend, family member or close brother or sister-in-Christ. Email them. Pray with and for them. Hang out with them. Communicate. Don't cut off all ties with them, for "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov 17:17, 18:24).

C. Have Fellowship with God (1 Jn 1:3-7)

Apart from opening up to others, it is also vital that we open our hearts to God. If we do this, we will never feel lonely because God is living in our hearts. Faith in God, prayer and Bible study helps to make the loneliness more tolerable and becomes an additional way of coping. Let God's word fill your mind and hearts. As the Lord promised Jacob, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you" (Gen 28:15).

In conclusion, how do we deal with loneliness? The secret lies in 1 John 1:3: "that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." Today we should no longer feel lonely because we have direct access to the Lord. If we have godly fellowship with the Lord and with brothers and sisters, our loneliness will disappear.

"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Heb 13:5).

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1 What is loneliness?

2 What are the two levels of loneliness?

5 What are the causes of loneliness and how can they be overcome?

6 How does sin cause us to be lonely?

7 What are the common effects of loneliness?

How can people overcome it?

What is the real secret in dealing with loneliness?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Part A: On Loneliness

The following is a brother's web log on the subject of loneliness. Read through it and then think about the questions that follow.

To my younger brother, my brethren-in-Christ at schools away from church, my friends who are without their parents, and all who are lonely:

For the last seven weeks or so, I've lived alone with my older brother; of which one week I was left completely alone since he went to NYTS. Normally, I thrive on these times—I have always valued independence, autonomy, and self-reliance. They are often very good learning experiences.

But during that week, while I did learn and experience much, on an emotional level, more often than expected, I have found myself lonely and longing for companionship. Actually, it's a feeling that sometimes also occurs even when surrounded by oodles of friends.

Sometimes we feel alone because of the problems we face, what lies ahead of us, and what we feel. But most often we feel left alone, ostracized, and cast away when there are no close friends nearby.

One thing that occurred to me in prayer in the last week is that Jesus Christ truly can sympathize and relate with loneliness; more than you can even imagine. After all, look at what is written:

"When He rose up from prayer, and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping..." (Lk 22:41).

No one comforted Him in his pain, His anguish, and His agony. No shoulder to cry on. No friend to hug and squeeze tight. No one to pray with Him to share mutual woes and flow the sympathizing tear. He was left alone to pray.

"Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled" (Mt 26:55).

Not one was willing to stand up for Jesus, after all He had done for them. He had given all; no one showed appreciation. He was left alone to die.

"Then he began to curse and swear, saying, 'I do not know the Man!'" (Mt 26:74).

Of all people, Peter, his closest disciple and friend, not only denied discipleship and friendship with Him, but denied relations with him. He was left alone to suffer.

"But they shouted, saying, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!'" (Lk 23:21).

The very people He loved, healed, exorcized, and fed, betrayed him. The people He came to save rejected Him, choosing a convict's life rather than the innocent, evil rather than grace, crimes rather than miracles. He was left alone to be despised.

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (Mt 27:46).

Of all the sinners deserving to be forsaken by God, God forsook His innocent Son. Jesus Christ was cast away from the presence of the living God. Of all beings, Lord Jesus was left alone by the One who shuns no one.

In utter opprobrium, Lord Jesus was left alone to suffer, bleed, and die.

In our own loneliness, there is One who empathizes to the fullest degree. One who sticks closer than a brother. One who knows all pains, all longings, all loneliness. One who was even forsaken by God. This is comfort beyond words to the sad and lonely. No matter how you try to hide it, no matter how much you don't want to think about it, no matter how much you drown yourself with the things of the world, in sadness and emptiness, pray in the Spirit. As Lord Jesus has promised, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (Jn 14:18).

You are not alone. Lord Jesus' heart goes out to all of you. He will be Your guide and stay if you let Him. And He is just a prayer away. (www.renewed.nu)

Questions to think about:

1. How is Christ able to understand our loneliness?
2. How will the Lord Jesus "not leave [us] orphans"?

Part B: All I Ever Do Is Love You

The following are the lyrics from the hymn: "All I Ever Do Is Love You."

"When you're feeling lonely, when your heart is aching, when something happens that makes you doubt my love. Then my child, come close to me, just be still and listen. I long to comfort you and renew you in my love."

Don't let your heart be troubled, just take my hand, it doesn't matter if you can't understand; don't be afraid, trust in my love, for I will never, ever fail you, I'll never forsake or let you down. All I ever do is love you, yes, you are always in my thoughts, you are always in my care; my arms of love are all you need, so learn to trust in me completely, for I will not forsake or let you go.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my word goes on forever, My word lives on forever. I will not forsake you, I will never leave you alone."

Questions to think about:

1. How do you feel when you read these lyrics?
2. "I'll never forsake or let you down." How does the Lord never forsake us nor let us down?
3. During your times of loneliness, what did you do to help yourself overcome it? How did the Lord help you? Be prepared to share with the class.

Part C: Reach Out!

We've already learned that everyone faces loneliness at some time or other. But we also studied that even though loneliness strikes, we can be assured that if we turn to Christ and walk with Him, we never need to be alone. Having been helped by Christ to overcome our loneliness, it's our turn to help others overcome theirs!

There was a woman who lived in a large apartment and worked in a shop with many people. Even though she knew a lot of people, every evening she would tune into the "sign off" statement of a radio station just to hear a voice saying, "We wish you a very pleasant good-night." She imagined that this person was just speaking to her! She hungered for a personal greeting even though she met hundreds of people every day.

Do you feel this hunger? Or do you know of someone who also feels this way? Why not reach out to someone and give that person a personal call or send them an email? Or think of other ways that you could reach out to someone so that they will experience the joy of feeling wanted and loved.

Here are some ideas that your class could do:

1. Put together a care package for those who have not been to church for a while, or who study away from home.
2. Call a friend and visit a member together.
3. Run an errand for a neighbor.

What other ideas can you come up with?

REFLECTION & PRAYER



Sing hymn 82: I Am Praying for You.

Our Lord Jesus has promised us that He will never leave us alone. Even though we may go through many trials and temptations, the Lord has promised us that He will be with us through all our problems. Not only will He be right there guiding and protecting us, He will also carry us through our tribulations and allow His love to embrace and envelop us. When you go through the turmoil of life, remember that God is with you all the way, praying for you. And when you have received the grace and peace from God, go ahead and strengthen your brethren too!

Lesson 11

Worry

Listed Scriptures

Phil 4:4-9; Mt 6:25-34; Rom 8:28; 1 Pet 5:7; Lk 12:22-31; Ps 37:8

Lesson Aim

- 1) To allow students to share the worries they have in their lives.
- 2) To understand what the Bible says about worry and how it should be dealt with.
- 3) To analyze ways to allow others and God to help with our burdens.

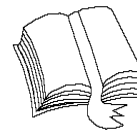
Memory Verse

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." (Phil 4:6)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Amos 2-4

BIBLE BACKGROUND



There is no Bible Background information for this lesson.