

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



Living in the Shadow of Loneliness

KEY PASSAGE: Genesis 2:18

► SUMMARY

Loneliness is an epidemic in our culture.

This isn't just something that only affects those who live in isolation; it's present in people who live in families, work with others, and have friends. Some lonely people have everything money can buy, but all their luxuries can't provide what's missing. Many times those who suffer from loneliness don't even know why they feel this way. From the outside, their lives look fine, but inside they are enclosed in a shadow of loneliness.

► SERMON POINTS

In the very beginning God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18). Since we were created to live in relationships, it's clearly not God's plan that we suffer from loneliness.

The Difference Between Loneliness and Solitude

- **Loneliness** is an unhappiness brought on by the feeling of being disconnected or out of touch. It's a loss of intimacy or the sense of belonging.
- **Solitude** is a time of pulling away from everything to be alone, to talk to the Father, listen to God, and to be rejuvenated in mind and heart. Jesus often withdrew from the crowds to be alone with His heavenly Father.

The Shadow of Loneliness

A shadow replaces the light of the sun for a period of time, but it is usually momentary. However, when a shadow of loneliness lingers for a long time, it becomes the atmosphere in which some people live. It's like being

in a dense fog that leaves them feeling disconnected from others. This is accompanied by a sense of isolation, unimportance, emptiness, purposelessness, incompleteness, or inadequacy.

People who are generally happy are content with their relationships and feel a sense of belonging and satisfaction, but those who live in the shadow of loneliness are unable to find satisfying relationships on a human level and end up feeling abandoned. Although loneliness may seem like an inescapable condition, it's possible to get through it and even conquer it when one is willing to be honest with himself and God.

The Effects of Loneliness

Loneliness is an emotion that affects many other areas of life.

- **Physical Health.** Feelings of isolation may affect a person's diet, sleep, and activities—all of which could result in health problems.
- **Finances.** Attempting to relieve loneliness with shopping, strolling through malls, and building up credit card debt won't bring satisfaction and may even increase feelings of separation.
- **Relationships.** Loneliness may drive people to seek out unhealthy or inappropriate relationships in order to feel valuable, needed, and loved.
- **Morals.** Seeking intimacy through sinful sexual relationships may seem like a way to relieve loneliness, but it will never satisfy the yearnings of the heart. Jesus Christ is the only one who can fill that emptiness.
- **Dress.** Sometimes lonely people think that dressing attractively will gain them attention from others, but that is no substitute for sound, fulfilling relationships.

- **Social Life.** Some folks may seek social connections thinking that being part of a group will solve their problem, but soon discover that they still feel alone.

How People End Up in the Shadow of Loneliness

- **Separating Themselves.** Some folks choose isolation and don't want to be bothered by others.
- **Feeling Deserted.** This is especially true when a marriage breaks up, and at least one person feels abandoned and deeply hurt by the separation.
- **Being Forcefully Removed From a Safe and Secure Environment.** Losing a home is traumatic, especially for children who need to feel secure in the love of their parents.
- **Suffering a Defeat.** Failure may cause people to withdraw because they think they don't measure up.
- **Chasing Success.** When people spend their lives building a career instead of relationships, they often realize too late that money and success can never replace satisfying relationships.
- **Burnout.** Having invested all their time and energy in their work, some people discover that they have damaged their health and failed to develop what matters most—meaningful relationships.
- **Loss of a Loved One.** Death brings pain, emptiness, and a terrible sense of loss that results in grief and loneliness.
- **Feeling Inferior and Insecure.** This is often the result of childhood experiences with parents who scolded and belittled.
- **Being Different.** Those who don't conform to society's expectations often feel ostracized because they don't think or act like others. Being ignored is very demeaning and carries lifelong consequences both emotionally and spiritually. Yet God offers what the world has failed to give them. When they are His children, He seals them forever as His own with the Holy Spirit and gives them eternal security and love.
- **Conflict and Misunderstanding.** Those who walk away instead of working through disagreements may find themselves in the shadow of loneliness. Learning to live

in harmony with each other as God desires is a safeguard against isolation.

- **Rejection Caused by Standing Up for Convictions.** We follow a long line of courageous people when we hold to biblical truths and suffer rejection as a consequence—Jesus, the apostles, and Christians throughout the ages.
- **Being Excluded from Social Groups.** We all feel like misfits in some situations. In fact, as believers, we shouldn't fit in everywhere because we are called to live a different lifestyle. Sometimes others see this distinction and want to know why we aren't like everyone else. Others will outright reject us because they don't know God.
- **Retirement.** This life transition may cause people to feel that no one cares for them anymore and that they have no purpose. Yet God loves and works through His people no matter how old they become if they are willing to give themselves away in service to others.
- **Betrayal.** When relationships are broken through betrayal, the pain may cause withdrawal.
- **Alienation.** Sometimes we may be the cause of someone's loneliness if we are prideful and don't care about them. But in the process of rejecting them, we ourselves may become alienated.
- **Feeling Left Behind.** Everyone needs to feel that someone loves, accepts, and cares for them. When this is missing, they feel ignored, shut out, and ostracized.
- **Age.** As people age, they may become lonely and feel forgotten by everyone.
- **Destructive Habits.** When people try to find a sense of contentment, peace, and joy through addictive activities like drunkenness, drug use, illicit sex, or gambling, they will discover that it only makes them feel more isolated.

► RESPONSE

- If you feel like you are living in a shadow of loneliness, how do you think you got there? What part have you played in becoming isolated and lonely?
- Has your loneliness become a wall behind which you hide? What do you need to do to tear down that wall and risk becoming the friend you want others to be to you?

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