

You are not alone

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Sermon Audio file

William Shatner - Captain James T Kirk said "Loneliness is a part of everybody's life, no matter how much attention you get, and how happily married you are, and how many children you have."

A recent study, conducted by the American Enterprise Institute, suggests that the proportion of people who can name six close friends has dropped from 55% to 27% since the 1990s, while people who have no close friends at all had risen from 3% to 12%. One in five single men say they do not have any close friends, while only 59% of Americans have what they would describe as a best friend.

We all feel lonely at times - it's a normal human emotion. We are wired for social contact and loneliness is a signal we need more!

During this last 17 months - you may have been experiencing a great sense of aloneness and loneliness. You are not alone in that! It's been tough for everyone.

Lots of Biblical characters experience of being alone

Joseph - was sold into slavery far from family

Moses - Had 40 years of wilderness living between fleeing Egypt and God sending Him back to free Israel from Egyptian slavery.

Ruth -lost her husband and was forced to care for her mother-in-law in an unknown land

Paul - often talks of isolation of ministry

John - Revelation written in exile on Patmos

There are four kinds of aloneness

1) Forced - David experienced forced isolation when he had to flee Saul - he had to abandon everything and flee to the wilderness.

Ps 31:9-12

Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress;

my eyes grow weak with sorrow,

my soul and body with grief.

10 My life is consumed by anguish

and my years by groaning;

my strength fails because of my affliction,

and my bones grow weak.

11 Because of all my enemies,

I am the utter contempt of my neighbours

and an object of dread to my closest friends—

those who see me on the street flee from me.

12 I am forgotten as though I were dead;

I have become like broken pottery.

2) Disengagement -

When David had become King and had success. That didn't mean feelings of isolation went. In fact as his success grew, he began to isolate himself more

2 Samuel 11:1 "In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem."

That sets up the scene of David alone on his palace roof. It's in this moment he saw Bathsheba and began his downward spiral into sin and loss. He ended up committing adultery and then murder. And losing a baby son.

Psychologists talk of disengagement theory - that as we age, especially men, we begin to disengage from relationships and complexity - self induced aloneness.

3) Loss - David lost Absalom

David would face yet another time of isolation during the rebellion of his son Absalom. David was forced to fight send his army against his own son. Though he requested that Absalom's life be spared, Absalom was defeated and killed in the battle.

David was devastated. It's the source of his famous line, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!"

Even as David's army returned victorious, David couldn't bring himself to welcome them home. He sat alone and in tears. Even surrounded by an army in celebration, even in the midst of his own victory, all David could feel was alone.

There are times when losing loved ones causes isolation and loss. Divorce and rejection in relationships is another source of loss loneliness.

4) Satan's lies - Satan loves us to feel isolated and alone - the only one going through a particular temptation or issue. I found 1 Cor 10:13 so helpful as a teen, learn it and quote it regularly to myself! Satan loves fear, unqualified, timidity, I am alone, No-one understands, God doesn't love me, I don't have enough faith

Aaaaagh What can we do!

<h3God's promise I will never leave you (HANDY)

A memorable kids talk got you to lift up your left hand and touch each finger with I Will Never Leave You. Anytime you feel alone, you do that! Unforgettable.

Simple but true. God says I will never leave you!

- If you feel Unqualified like Moses at the burning bush. God says in Exodus 3:12 I will be with you! And He was which meant at the end of his life as Moses was about to hand over God could tell him to pass that message on to the whole of Israel Deut 31:6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

- If you are struggling with fear like Joshua, God says to you Josh 1:5 "as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you or forsake you"

- If you are feeling overwhelmed by the task ahead like Solomon 1 Chr 28:20 David also said to Solomon his son, "Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished.

- When you feel like you are Walking through the deep waters Isa 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers they will not sweep over you.

- When you feel like you are walking through fire Isa 43:3 is for you "When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, the flames will not set you ablaze."

You are not alone - God says I will never leave you!

You may have left him - we all have from birth. Walking our own way, doing it our own way. But God is always there. Always longing for you to turn back to him and experience his forgiveness, his always there presence through Jesus. To experience God's I will never leave you or forsake you - we have to first turn

to Him

Don't give up! A few years ago, I was browsing the bargain section in Waterstones and picked up Louis Zamperini's Don't Give up, don't give in book for a pound. looked interesting - life lessons from an extraordinary man - Olympic athlete, soldier, survivor. In the late thirties his mile time was 4:08 and he was aiming for the 1940 Tokyo Olympics to be the first to beat the 4 sec barrier - but of course WW2 got in the way. He fought and crashed his B24 in the Pacific and survived 47 days adrift in a raft and then 2.5 years of torture in a Japanese POW camp. He knew a thing or two about not giving up! He became a Christian at an early Billy Graham rally in 1949 and lived an incredible life of blessing to others.

He knew God - I will never leave you and like Esther in the midst of difficulty faced the choice of giving up or carrying on and making a massive difference.

Esther 4:14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Keep going! Don't give up if you are feeling alone - Know that God says I will never leave you - and keep sticking at it! Phil 1:6 tells us that God who began the good work in you will carry it on to completion!

He will not leave you. He will not forsake you. He will finish the work he called you to do.

Everything God has for us is contained in these simple words: "I will never leave you." Whatever you need from the Lord, he will supply it because he will never leave you. If you feel inadequate, that's good because you will depend even more on the Lord.

In practice

1 Follow the leader - Holy Spirit

We have the Spirit dwelling inside of us. The third person of the trinity is on you and in you if you are a Christ follower. He will guide you into all truth Jesus promised and He makes the experienced of "I will never leave you" felt!

It's the Holy Spirit who introduces us to Jesus - we hear the words of the good news about Jesus spoken to us or read them, but it is the Holy Spirit that awakens our hearts - like a pilot light on a boiler coming on - God's spark alight in us so we are never alone.

And there's a fullness He gives too. You can be filled with the Spirit and know His indwelling power and anointing. Love to pray for you for that at the end.

Acts 3:16 promises times of refreshing - re-filling with God's powerful presence.

2 Take the long-view

You are in a season of life right now. Seasons changes. As Solomon wrote there is a time for everything There is a time for everything,

and a season for every activity under the heavens:

- 2 a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- 3 a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
- 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
- 5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
- 6 a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- 7 a time to tear and a time to mend,

a time to be silent and a time to speak,
8 a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

Too many people give up just before the blessing comes God is with you and at work in and around you. Don't give up, keep pressing on with the truth of "I will never leave you"

Don't do it alone

I mentioned earlier about loneliness caused disengagement - it's been a season of forced loneliness for many and we will have got used to being at home! So tempting to carry on being disengaged at the moment. It's simpler, easier but we miss out on the richness of connection and fellowship.

Fey mentioned to Janet last week how easy it is to watch the service online, but what a blessing it was to make the effort to be with people. Don't do it alone - choose fellowship and community.

In September we are re-launching our small groups and over the next few weeks we will begin to get you to sign up if you would like to join a group - small groups help us to gather, to grow and to go together and they help banish loneliness.

You may be lonely yourself, or you may not be lonely - encourage you to be looking out to those around us - phone calls, text messages, meeting up for a coffee or a walk.

Talk to yourself

A couple of weeks ago Mike's sermon was on talking to yourself.

Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones "Have you realised that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself"

Tell yourself if you are lonely the truth "I will never leave you"