

Loneliness.

In the first book of Kings and chapter 19 we have the story of Elijah running away from Jezebel. He'd won a great victory for the Lord against the false prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Jezebel wasn't pleased. We find Elijah sitting at the bottom of a Juniper tree and he's having a grumble. He says in verse 19, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death by the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me". Notice the words, "I am the only one left". Elijah felt alone, lonely. Other great people of God in the Bible felt that way sometimes. David said in Psalm 25 verse 16, "I am lonely and afflicted". Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 9, "Do your best to come to me quickly". Why? Because he felt alone and needed company.

Do you identify with Elijah? Do you feel lonely? According to statistics one in every six people don't have a personal friend. 40% of the population are shy and therefore isolated. 80% of people seeking psychiatric help say loneliness triggered it off. 50,000 suicides are the result of loneliness. One woman said to her Doctor, "When I die I want to be cremated and my ashes thrown over Blackpool Pleasure Beach". The Doctor asked, "Why?". "Well", she said, "then I can be sure my children will visit me at least twice a week!".

Loneliness has a number of causes. It can be the result of mobility as your job moves around the country. You never settle long enough to make lasting friends. There's a loss of community and trust these days. This brings about lack of association with others. Some slump in front of the TV each night. They rarely have conversation with the family or go out and socialise. Shy people have trouble making friends and feel lonely. People who are away from home for the first time feel lonely such as Students, and Asylum seekers. Old age limits activity and housebound people are lonely. Loneliness can affect widows, widowers, divorced people, singles, and teenagers who are bored at weekends. It strikes at different times, maybe

through death, or the empty nest when children leave home. Loneliness has no regard for age either. Albert Einstein once said in his later years, "It is strange to be known so universally and yet be so lonely". At the other end of the age range Marilyn Monroe said, "Sometimes I think the only people who stay with me and really listen are people I hire and people I pay". Loneliness has been the theme of many a popular song. Elvis Presley asked, "Are you lonesome tonight", and Roy Orbison sang, "Only the Lonely know why I cry".

The Bible provides teaching that shows the way to handle loneliness. There's God's provision. Elijah wanted to die. He says in 1 Kings chapter 19 verse 4, "He came to a Juniper tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough Lord' he said 'take my life' ". Verse 5 tells us that he "fell asleep".

There's God's natural provision! A good nights sleep does you the world of good! Worry keeps you awake. Sleep refreshes you and helps to put your troubles in perspective. You can then approach them with a refreshed and alert mind the next day. God also made sure Elijah had some food. Verses 5 and 6 say, "All at once an Angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat'. He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals and a jar of water". Loneliness can lead to depression and then to loss of appetite. Physical nourishment is vital for you to cope with the challenges you face in life. When you're weak you're good for nothing. Work at getting yourself mentally and physically in shape. You'll be more able to cope with the stresses and strains of life.

Then we see God's presence as an answer to loneliness. In verse 11 God says to Elijah, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord". Jean Paul Richter the 18th century philosopher said, "We are orphans you and I. Every soul in this vast corpse-trench of the universe is utterly alone". That's not true for the Christian. Jesus said in John chapter 14 verse 18, "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you". You can only ever experience the reality of this when you've asked him to forgive you your sins and to be your personal saviour and Lord. From then on begins a living relationship with the risen saviour. He enters your life, and is with you in all the situations you face, even those times when you feel alone. I visited an elderly lady living by herself in a flat one day. I asked her if she felt lonely at times.

“Never”, she said, “I’ve got Jesus here with me!!” You may feel lonely and abandoned in that hospital bed, or in that empty house, or as you stood by the graveside of a loved one. You’re not alone God is there with you.

Another way to cope with loneliness is to remember God’s purpose. God still had some work for Elijah to do in his service. In verses 15 and 16 we read, “The Lord said to him8. ‘anoint Hazael King over Aram8. and anoint Jehu8King over Israel’”. The great antidote for loneliness is active involvement in serving God. Someone once said, “Get your mind off yourself there are emptier cups than yours”. A woman known as Aunty Betty was a well-loved member of her church. Her children had grown up and left home. Her husband had died. Her home was empty of the noise and chatter she’d become familiar with. She could have sat at home bemoaning her lot. She became everyone’s Aunty Betty! She sang in the choir, taught in the Sunday school, visited the sick, organised the annual Holiday Bible Club. She befriended the children in a nearby children’s home, and sent each of them a birthday card every year. Active involvement with people and activities will fill your life with a sense of fulfilment whether you’re young or old. Of course, age and infirmity can limit what you’re able to do. If that’s you, then you could write to missionaries and pray for them. You could send a letter of encouragement to your Pastor. A caring church will include you in its visitation programme.

God has also provided his people to help you when you face loneliness. God says to Elijah in verse 18, “Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel-all who have not bowed down to Baal”. One mistake Elijah made as he fled for Jezebel was to leave his servant in Beersheba. He had no fellowship. God has provided the local church for you. It’s here you can make friends. When God created Adam he said in Genesis 2 verse 18, “It is not good for the man to be alone”. God made him a bride. God’s remedy for your loneliness is the same. He’s given you a bride. The church is the bride of Christ. Each Christian is there for others in the fellowship to provide encouragement and friendship. Psalm 68 verse 6 says, “God sets the lonely in families”. The church is the family of God. You need never be alone whilst you have Christian fellowship to enjoy. So develop friendships with other believers. Have them

round for coffee or a meal. Visit the elderly of the church. If you're feeling alone just now as you listen to this talk, then apply these lessons to your life and you will be able to deal with loneliness.