

Counterfeit Connections

"Why Do I Feel So Alone?"

Genesis 2:18

Maybe we've thought this or asked ourselves this question: *"Why do I feel so alone?"* It can be a hard thing to admit for many. Sometimes, when we feel this deep sense of loneliness, our instinct is to just suck it up - just press through it - just ignore it and it'll go away. *Right?* The reality is, *everyone* deals with this. Apparently, the older we get, the worse this gets. It doesn't get better for most people. It's not like a symptom of youth or just a symptom of immaturity or something we grow out of. In fact, if we don't learn to deal with loneliness God's way, it'll grow and we'll feel less and less able to even talk about it.

Genesis 2:18 NLT

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.'"

This is the very first "not-good" thing in the Bible. Everything that God had done up to this point, He said, *"It's good. It's good. It's very good."* But then God says, *"It is not good for man to be alone."* Then he immediately proposes a *solution* by saying, *"I've got an answer to Adam's problem. I will make a helper who is just right for him."* Chronic loneliness - the deep-aching, soul-level sense of feeling alone - has been the silent assassin in our modern culture of living the vibrant life that God has called us to live.

In 1934, Admiral Richard Bird volunteered for a five-month-long assignment to an isolated base in Antarctica where he would be totally alone, and he *wanted* to go there. He was going to have time to just *think* - to have his own thoughts - to write and think about his life. He went in all excited about it, but within weeks of being there, he started having hallucinations, and a deep despair settled into his life. He started having memory problems and became emotionally unstable, and it got worse and worse. Even though he had a radio, he wouldn't tell anybody what was happening, and by the time they finally got him out of there, he was borderline crazy.

In the 1800's, Eastern State Penitentiary got a bright idea to help prisoners reform. They decided to expose their prisoners to near total isolation for extended period of times, their thesis being, *"If we just isolate them, it's going to help produce repentance in them, and help make them consider what they've done and help them reform."* But, after isolating the prisoners from one another for long periods of time, instead of helping them, the prisoners became mentally ill. They started hearing voices. Severe depression set in and they lost the ability to function socially, and they had to be mentally and emotionally *rebuilt*.

In the early 1900's, babies in orphanages experienced a mortality rate of almost seventy percent. Even though all of their physical needs were met, the babies weren't being interacted with. They weren't being touched, held, or talked to, and the deep loneliness produced from a lack of interaction, affection, touch, and care was literally causing them to die. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General warned that chronic loneliness has the same health risks as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day, and increased the risk of premature death from 26 to 32%.

Science has shown that our brains treat loneliness like physical pain that also causes a decline in our physical health. Chronic loneliness increases heart disease and blood pressure. It weakens our immune function and causes inflammation. It increases the onset of dementia and lessens sleep quality. We live in the most connected generation in the history of the world, yet this problem is worse than ever. We might think, *"I don't need other people. All I need is myself. People are just a nuisance anyway. I don't need connection."*

In 2025, a survey called "Loneliness in America" found that fifty-seven percent of Americans were experiencing profound and persistent loneliness. Since then, that rate has *doubled*, and, even after COVID ended, it hasn't declined. Thirty-one percent of people in America still report feeling lonely at least some of every single day, and loneliness has even become a widespread and global issue.

Many of us can relate to being at an airport, and when we try to sit in one of the chairs at the gate that's got a plug-in with a connection to charge our device, it seems like every time, without fail, we plug in the device and it doesn't work - because there's no *power*. And so we move to another seat, thinking maybe *that* one will work. But - *nothing*. Move over there. *No*. We end up sitting in *fifteen* different places trying to find a plug that works. And, then we get on the airplane, which has *"free Wi-Fi connections."* And then - *"Yeah, okay, there's the signal. It's showing up on my device. Click it. Hey, I've got bars!"*

But, even though it's got bars and it's saying there's a signal, it doesn't *work*. And then to top it all off, when we get home and get in our car, where it says *"wireless charger, set phone here."* We set it there, but because of the stupid huge camera bump on it, it won't actually connect. We can't get a connection no matter *what* we do. It's like empty promises of "connections" are everywhere. And this is exactly what's happening to us in our spiritual lives as well. There's an empty promise of connection everywhere in our culture. And yet, we are more lonely and more isolated than we've ever been as a people.

There are so many counterfeit “plugs” in our lives that don't work - social media with all its “likes” and “followers,” and yet it leaves us empty, powerless, and hollow. We have constant *entertainment* - there's always *something* we can entertain ourselves with - *business* - *a full schedule is a full life!* Then there's *digital communication* - all the time talking to people, but never having a physical presence and being eye-to-eye and face-to-face with somebody - *“I've been talking to people all day and yet it has somehow left me empty.”*

Good or bad, the point is, these things don't solve the soul-level ache that we all have. Casual sex, dating apps, career ambition, consumerism - *buy, buy, buy* with just a “click.” Dopamine, dopamine, dopamine - that'll take care of it, *right?* Alcohol, substances, but when the buzz fades, the pain stays. How about pornography? Intimacy with no risk - easy connection. How about tribal politics? *“I just need to find my group and we'll have the same enemies.”* We've got shared enemies, but we don't have shared *life*. The latest thing is “AI companions,” They'll respond 24-7 - anytime we want. Even better, they'll tell us exactly what we want to hear. The only problem is, *they're not real*.

There's people actually “dating” these things - because they're aching for *something* to fill them with a *connection* - endless and powerless noise in their lives. Then, maybe the worst one of all - *church attendance without biblical community*. This is dangerous because it sounds so spiritual. *“I go to church. I attend the events, but does anybody know me - really know me?”* Do we really know anybody or are we just *there*? All these *connections* don't solve the problem - *“Okay, all right, I'm going to try pornography - intimacy without risks. And look, there's all kinds of ways and opportunities to connect to it. All right, I'm just going to power this on here and just hold this down, right? This should give me all the power I need, right?”* We keep plugging in but we're getting the same result - the empty promise - but the ache in our soul remains.

Modern culture gives us more ways to connect than ever, yet we're the loneliest people that ever lived. We have contact without closeness, followers without friendship, entertainment without fulfillment, sex without intimacy, and noise without peace. We're plugged into *everything*, and somehow we still have no power. What do we feel on the inside when the noise dies down and we get quiet? Do we ever hear that thought? *“There's no one who would want to know me if they really knew me.”* Then the power just drains and drains and we get that little empty battery of death saying, *“Nope, you got nothing.”*

Every single human being experiences loneliness. Even some of the greatest people in the Bible talked about the loneliness they walked through. Elijah experienced loneliness after the greatest moment of victory in his life on Mount Carmel. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, regularly had visitations of loneliness. Job experienced seasons of loneliness. Paul talked about loneliness when he was betrayed by people and was left on his own. Jesus experienced loneliness in the garden of Gethsemane when he couldn't get those closest to him to pray with him for even an hour. Ultimately, when he was on the cross, and the Father had to turn his eyes away from him, Jesus cried out, *“Father, why have you forsaken me?”*

King David experienced loneliness, and talked about it quite a bit in the Psalms. In Psalm 25:16 he said, *"I am lonely and afflicted."* Everybody experiences loneliness, but it's meant to be a *visitor* in our life, not a chronic and permanent resident there. Loneliness is meant to visit for a moment - for a season - and then *leave*. It's never meant to be permanent, and it's that chronic, permanent residence of aching loneliness that never goes away that's killing us. All kinds of things can trigger a visitation of loneliness - somebody betrays us, we lose friends, a loved one dies - or, a major life-change can trigger it.

But if we're in the position God wants us to be, it visits and then it leaves. Here's the question: *"What's the root of chronic, un-remitting, aching, soul-level loneliness that's hard for us to talk about?"* In 1948 and 1959, on two separate instances, Richard Wurmbrand was arrested and imprisoned by the communists in Romania for his Christian faith because he refused to compromise with state atheism. In both cases, one lasting eight years and one for six years, he was arrested, imprisoned by the communists, and thrown into solitary confinement for most of his captivity. The prisoners were forbidden to speak to one another much of the time, but he was known as a man who would preach to himself - he would recite Scripture - and he was known as a man who experienced deep *joy*.

In fact, he said, *"We were terribly lonely, but Christ's presence was so real that I would not have exchanged that prison for a king's palace."* Something different happened with Richard when he got out of there. He wrote a book called Tortured for Christ, which has sold millions of copies and accounts of all the ways Christ met him in the midst of that isolation and produced deep life in him. In the 1600's, John Bunyan was in prison for twelve years for preaching without a license in England. He was separated from his church, his family, and from his blind daughter that he deeply loved and missed so much.

But, instead of being broken during those years of isolation, John Bunyan wrote a little book called The Pilgrim's Progress, which became the number-two selling book of all time after the Bible. It sold 250 million copies and is one of the best allegories of the gospel ever written. Bunyan was quoted as saying, *"Christ's comfort in prison often exceeded what I had experienced outside of prison."* So, how did this isolation not touch him like it did other people? In 2 Timothy 4:16, after being taken to trial for preaching about Jesus, Paul said, *"At my first defense, no one came to my support. Everyone deserted me, but the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength."*

Paul acknowledged the pain of abandonment and the opportunity for loneliness, but he also acknowledged something greater - the reality of Christ's presence *with* him. After they tried to boil him in oil and he would not die, the Apostle John, exiled on the Isle of Patmos, was isolated, removed from ministry, church, and any contact with people. But, while he was on that island, John had the most profound encounter with the risen Jesus of his life, and out of that came the Book of Revelation.

Hebrews 13:5 AMP

"For He has said, 'I will never [under any circumstances] desert you [nor give you up nor leave you without support, nor will I in any degree leave you helpless], nor will I forsake or let you down or relax My hold on you [assuredly not]!' "

Why not *us*? Why is this not our experience when we're cast into situations that cause loneliness to visit? Why do we get trapped in the profound permanent residency of it rather than being liberated from it with the very presence of Jesus himself? Because only God can make that promise to us. Nobody can say, *"Hey, I'll never leave you. I'll never desert you,"* except for God. The root of chronic loneliness is this disconnection from God, and all of our counterfeit connections we throw ourselves, our lives, and our energy into over and over. They produce the fear, the sin, the shame, and the guilt that keeps us disconnected from the God who produced what he did in John Bunyan, Richard Wurmbrand, John, and Paul.

There is a place we can be saved, yet separated from fellowship with God, and it is a terrible place to live as a believer. We can be saved and going to heaven, but by our choices, disconnect ourselves from the God who brings life, healing, and wholeness, and who causes us to feel known and loved in a way that fortifies us in every circumstance - because we're not powered into the One who actually runs the software that we're built on. But if we find that secret place and that hidden plug and we connect to him, the power comes on. As long as we keep that connection, it charges and charges and charges until it's full to capacity.

But, as easy as it is to draw near to God and seek him, it's just as easy to go, *"Ooh, look at this!"* And we may even have a little bit of charge left, so we think it's still working - but we're actually *draining*. And then when the real problems hit, we're on an empty tank and we have *nothing*. We were made by God for connection with him, for communion with him, for relationship with him - and to do it all with a clear conscience *before* him. The presence of chronic loneliness in our life is a flashing warning light that maybe this connection isn't fully secure. Why do we expect to have the peace of God in our lives when God only gets a piece of our lives? *"Plug all the way in!"* is what he's saying.

St. Augustine said, *"You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in You."* It's the same in Psalm 42:2 where the psalmist cries out, *"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."* There's only one remedy for an aching soul. It's Jesus and a vital connection with him and him alone. *People* cannot be a substitute for that connection. Nothing can. Nothing else powers our operating system but the Creator of the universe himself.

1 John 2:15-17 MSG

"Don't love the world's ways. Don't love the world's goods. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world - wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important - has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from Him. The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out - but whoever does what God wants is set for eternity."

Proverbs 18:1 NKJV

"A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment."

The reality is, most of our isolation and deep loneliness is actually self-imposed. In *the Lord of the Rings* series, Gallum is so obsessed with the ring of power that he becomes completely isolated. He starts withering away and decaying, and whenever anybody tries to come into his orbit and talk sense into him, he thinks they're just trying to steal from him the one thing that he wants. This obsession is what happens when we're disconnected from the One who runs our software. We want everything and anything because we're desperately trying to quench the ache in our soul and we see everything else as a threat to it, especially God.

The quickest path to loneliness and despair is a constant meditation on, and an obsession with, ourself - our own problems, our own life, desires, wants - our own reflection in the mirror. It has a paralyzing effect on the life that God designed for us to live. The Bible tells us we were created to fix our eyes not on ourselves but on him - that as we look to him to fulfill our every need and our every desire, that only then can he power that which is deep inside of us - which all of those other things can't. It's when we look to him and *stop* looking to ourselves and all the things that we think are going to give us what we want.

The core issue Jesus ultimately came to deal with on the cross was separation and disconnection. We were eternally separated in an irreparable way from the Father who is holy and perfect and just - who is light and in him is no darkness at all. The darkness of our hearts couldn't co-exist in the light of his presence. And unless we fix what's going on in our soul and our heart, we can't have connection - we can't have *relationship*. So he sent Jesus to take on himself the very things that separate us from the Father.

When we submit our life to Jesus, he removes the junk, the dirt, the filth, and the disconnection. And he gives us the path to say, *"Now you can connect to the Father. The door is open. The veil is torn. You have access to God."* This is what it says in John 14:21 - Jesus said, *"The person who has my commands and keeps them, who plugs into me, is the one who really loves me. And whoever really loves me, will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him. I will make myself real to him."*

Why did John Bunyan prosper where others would have withered and died? Because Jesus made himself real to him, because he said, *"I don't just have your commandments, Lord. I'm giving my whole life to you. I want to keep what you say because what you say feeds my soul."* And that vital connection produced the manifest presence of Christ in his life that fueled and sustained him even though he didn't have anything else. This is the solution to loneliness. It's to become a person who goes, *"I want what God wants. I want what You want, Lord."* Some will say, *"But I've tried to connect to Jesus and it doesn't work."* Psalm 25:14 answers that by saying, *"Friendship with God is reserved for those who revere him."*

The reverence for God pushes us closer to him, causes us "to draw near." Friendship with God is intimate, personal, real, and manifest relationship. God will never manifest himself in a place or in a person's life where he's not held in the utmost reverence. He won't do it. *"When I'm trying to connect to God, why isn't it working?"* It's like being in a foreign country and our U.S. plug won't connect, so we need a converter - an adapter. And, when we come to Christ, we don't connect at first. Why? Because we need to be *converted*. We need an adapter that only *he* can provide that will allow our connection to fit into his connection. And guess who's not changing? *Him*. We have to change. The good news is, he's provided the power for us to change. He's provided the *adapters* so that our plug will fit perfectly into what he has for us.

In Jeremiah 15, God says, *"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born, I set you apart and appointed you."* He knew everything about us before we were even created - every intent, every thought of our heart, every detail, every potential we had, every weakness we had, he knows us deeply and thoroughly. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, *"God's companionship is not a substitute for human companionship, but it is the foundation. There's no way you can have a healthy life-giving friendship or relationship with somebody else if you don't get that connection correct first. That is the basis, the foundation for every other right relationship and vital connection you'll have in your life."*

Mark 12:30: Jesus said, *"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. And, you shall love your neighbor as yourself."* First we do *this*, and then from that, God brings into our orbit the right people at the right times in the right ways so that we can love them like he's loved us. But, making other people the root and the source of our deep heart-level need for connection creates an unsustainable drain on them and on us. If I try to get from you what I can only get from God, we're both going to be disconnected. People can ease the ache of loneliness for a moment in our life, but only God can heal the loneliness of our soul. Human relationships help us feel connected, but only the Creator can know us fully - *and satisfy the deep hunger in our heart.*

Psalms 68:6 NLT

"God places the lonely in families; he sets the prisoners free and gives them joy..."

Prayer - *Father, in Jesus name, You promised to never leave us helpless, to never forsake us, to never abandon us, to never desert us - that You wouldn't leave us orphans, that You would come to us, that You'd fill us, that You'd live on the inside of us, and that You would give our soul the fuel and the life that only You can give. Lord, would You refuel and fill us right now? Give us the power and the grace to confess and repent of our sin right now. Lord, we lay down everything, every counterfeit connection, every false way, every sin and idol and want that has nothing to do with You. We cast it aside. We don't want that. We want You, Jesus. Have your way in our spirits right now. In Jesus' name. Amen*