

Week 1 – July 6th –Loneliness – (CWP - Heart of Southland)

Update on Care Ministry

Good morning! What an AMAZING testimony, and if you thought that was good, that was just the “trailer” to a much bigger testimony that will be online. This morning we are going to do things a little differently. I am going to split this morning into 2 parts, and I would like to start with an update on the Care Ministry and share a few things God has been doing this past year, before we get into the new mini message series. There are 4 different areas I would like to bring your attention to, starting with that small building that is on the south-west side of the church. Have you ever seen it and wondered what that is??

1. Distribution Centre

The Distribution Centre or “DC” as we call it, houses the garage that our wonderful properties staff use, but it also has this door on the side. Here you can drop off items that you are no longer using. Things like clothing, mattresses, dressers, couches, kitchen tables, and chairs every day from 6am-9pm. So, what happens to the stuff that gets dropped off here? Well, donations go to **2 different places** in our church, either through our **Benevolence team** or to the **Clothing Closet**, which I will get to in a minute. When donations get dropped off, we have a team of volunteers and some staff that go through it and see what we can use, and they then put it in the DC for storage until we have need of it. Now people can come to church here either from our congregation, or they have been referred by someone, and once they get here, we ask them to fill out a Benevolence form. This way we can see what needs they have and then see how we can help them. For example, if someone has just immigrated into the country and has nothing, many times we are able to help with things like pots or a dresser for them. Now, this might surprise you to hear this, but one of our biggest needs that we just never seem to have enough of is mattresses. We get many requests from single moms or people whose health has worsened, or kids growing up out of their cribs into a bed, and they cannot afford a mattress. [Story - One single mom I spoke with was so utterly happy that we could give her a mattress after her husband left her. She said that her kids thanked God every night when they lay on their church mattresses that God gave them!](#) This makes such a lasting impact in these people’s lives that we are able to help them and give them something so precious as a mattress, but not just a mattress, a place where they can go and rest, fall asleep knowing that this was given to them through the church to make a tangible difference in their lives. In **the last 2 years, we were able to give away 81 mattresses!** If you are not sure what to drop off, just drop it off; we (John Abrams) can take care of it. The clothes, though, don’t stay in the Distribution Centre, they come here to the clothing closet...

2. Clothing Closet

Here we have Mel Fast and Jody Loeppky with about 10 additional volunteers who sort, inspect, and then organize the clothing. This is no small task, and you can go and peek through the windows in the Seminar Room, and you can see what they have all done. Here are a few more pictures of their handiwork... Clothing is such a basic need we all have, thanks to Adam and Eve, and this is something that we have been able to do well here, thanks to many, many of you who have given so generously over the years!! This is just another way that we can be the church, helping others in a small way like they did in Acts, and it's also an opportunity for you to practice each one, reach one. How do you practice each on reach one, you might ask? Easy, if you know of someone in need, bring them here to the church office, ask for a clothing closet form and then fill it out with them, and then one of the wonderful volunteers will call them and make an appointment with them. Now let's say you write down that you need a jacket and shoes for the kids, or some t-shirts, the volunteers will go and get some clothes ready for you to make sure we have at least a couple to pick from, and you can come with them through that.

Story – One day, someone donated a box of diapers, and that's not something we always accepted back then, but we had it there sitting in a corner, not sure what to do with it. A couple of days later, there was a couple in there getting some clothing and looking for some baby stuff. They had a Young baby crying, and one of the volunteer moms there recognized that it was a newborn, engaged a little with the couple, and asked if they needed anything else... The new mom said, Yeah, we're looking for diapers. What size do you need? Well, it was exactly the size of the diapers that got donated!!! So we could bless them with diapers as well, and now, we take diapers too! If you want to volunteer at the clothing closet, let me know, and we can get you signed up to help others. One big need we always have at the clothing closet is winter gear, specifically jackets. Speaking of jackets earlier, just one more story of how God works: This is a very recent one where a single mom came in, and she had 7 kids, and the dad had just left them. She came in hearing that we give away clothes, she filled out the form, and she was looking particularly for jackets for all of them. Now jackets is hard to find but this volunteer managed to get jackets for every kid except one, which is pretty cool right, now she was looking for one more where her husband showed up with a coffee for her and she told him that they are looking for one more jacket and they just can't find another one. Well, he took his jacket off and gave it to them, and the mom felt bad accepting it, but he insisted and said, See if it fits. Well, she was thankful and left with it and called back a couple of hours later, saying it's too big... In the meantime, this volunteer was going through all the bags and found not one, not two, but three jackets that would fit him. She came in and got what she needed! God is so Good, eh!! Next up...

3. Hearts and Hands

This might be something that you have not heard of before because I think this is the first time it's been mentioned on stage. The Heart and Hands Ministry was a picture that I got back in September '24 of starting a ministry that functions in 2 parts. I had no idea how in the world this would work, but I felt in prayer that I just needed to start! On one side, **“the heart” would be focused on meeting people** when they are going through a tough time, or they feel lonely, or have just had surgery, or simply need someone to listen and then pray with them. The other side, **“the hand” side, would go and do practical work**, help people where they need help with raking leaves, or helping them move, or maybe even help them fix something they can't. When it started, it was a bit touch and go, and being honest with you, I kept dropping the ball and could not get it going properly... [Story – One day, I get a phone call from Michele Friesen, Wes's wife, asking if we could meet. Sure, I said, we made an appointment and she came in with Wes, we sat down and she told me that she just had knee surgery. I said yeah, I remember, and she then told me that she was kind of hurt that nobody came to visit her after the surgery, made her feel unseen and forgotten... MAN, did I ever feel worthless as a care pastor at that moment... How did I miss this opportunity... BUT she was not angry, she was smiling through all of this, and she said I took it to prayer, and she had an idea!! There are probably other people in the church who feel the same way... So she looks at me and says that they want to help me by meeting with people in our church who need a visit. I SAID YES!!!! Wow, what can answer to prayer, but she was not done yet, she said another could, Jon and Ange Funk also want to help, but they want to do practical stuff and help that way... I was completely and utterly shocked!! BUT GOD eh.... So now we have these 2 amazing couples who have hearts to reach out to others running the 2 teams. Imagine with me here a bit. In our church, we have many people who have amazing skills, skills I do not possess, fixing stuff in a house, or some of you, like me, don't have many skills, but man, you can lift and move something. If you feel that you want to come and help us out, let me know, and I can put you on the team where Jon and Ange will reach out on the chat when there is a need, and we will see who can come down and help them out. It's so much fun and very rewarding to be able to go and be the practical hands and feet of Jesus and show others that the church cares not just with words, but by action as well.](#)

4. Personal Prayer Ministry

Lastly, but certainly not least, I want to talk about an amazing ministry here that runs all year round, and it's been around forever and has done so much for our church behind the scenes, and that's our Personal Prayer Ministry. This ministry takes what we learn from the Set Free, and we put it into practice where we meet people and then together go to Jesus and let Him guide us through our past hurts and pains and bring healing where the enemy has tried to steal, kill, and destroy. It reminds me of

the verse in **Joel 2:25a** I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, There is a team of volunteer ministers that God has gifted that work with me and Cynthia Falk here on staff that sit down every week meeting with many.

Story – One such time, Cynthia met with a lady who felt alone and not seen by God, almost like God forgot about her. So, how do you respond when someone says that? Thankfully, like I said, we do not have to come up with an answer, but we can go to Jesus together! So they prayed, and she got Psalm 139. No idea what was there, and they looked it up and it said: **Psalms 139:1-4** O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. **God knows!** There are many stories of how the Holy Spirit ministers through our volunteers, and here I would like to honor them and show you that they are just **normal people who also went through the dark night of the soul**; they get it!!!

- **Women's** Group – Wednesday Mornings
 - Lori Reimer, Nancy Peters, Connie Hamm & Terry Schellenberg
- **Men's** Group – Sunday Mornings
 - John Pendergrast and Trevor Boschman

If you want to help or get involved?

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|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Distribution Centre | - mattresses |
| 2. The Clothing Closet | - winter gear (jackets)(volunteers) |
| 3. Hearts & Hands Ministry | - practical skills and/or muscles |
| 4. Personal Prayer Ministry | - prayer |

As I have spoken to some of our Personal Prayer Ministers, we have noticed a common theme arising from our meetings. It's not new, and it's something we saw more during the pandemic, but after restrictions were lifted, I did not see it getting better; in fact, it has gotten worse over the last couple of years... You know what it is? **Loneliness** and it's the topic I want to explore for the next couple of weeks here...

A. Loneliness Today

So, what is loneliness exactly? Loneliness does not simply mean being alone, but loneliness is feeling emotionally isolated even if you are in a crowd of people. You might walk into a family gathering or go to a bonfire and feel that no one sees you, that you do not belong there. No matter how much you try to smile, trying to hide it behind humor, or pushing others away so that you are not the one being pushed out, you hurt inside. Or worse yet, and this one we need to work on more, people walking into church and feeling lonely and unseen. And I say that the church one is worse yet, because this is the place where people should feel like they belong! There are many passages that talk about this:

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 - Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has no another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Feeling lonely is hard, but when we fall alone, it's even harder! As Ecclesiastes says here, when there is no one else to lift us up... Being in my position here, and this is something that our volunteers in the Care Ministry see as well. When we see people fall, financially, emotionally, we start by asking a few questions: Do you have someone? Do you have a community? Is someone walking with you? And in the past, we would get the occasional no, and we would help, but that is unfortunately happening more and more, where we see that people have no one around them. We can all feel lonely sometimes. But prolonged and/or intense experiences of loneliness can have negative impacts on our lives. It can affect our health and well-being:

- i. **Loneliness has PHYSICAL & EMOTIONAL consequences**, and the impacts of loneliness have been called by many around the world as the silent epidemic. Look at some stats from the CDC:
 - **About 1 in 3 adults in the U.S. report feeling lonely.**
 - **About 1 in 4 U.S. adults report NOT having social and emotional support.** That's a staggering statistic... 1 in 4 people do not have someone you can call at 3am and talk to when they fall or go through a tough time.

Let's try something here this morning, **IF your last name starts with the letter A-H, can I get you to please stand for a moment if you can?** That is roughly a quarter of us here this morning, right? Saying a statistic is one thing, but take a moment and look around, according to the stat, that is the rough number in our area where people feel they have nobody to call... Thank you, you can sit again... So what does that mean? Well, there is another side to this as well... **If you are feeling alone this morning, you are not alone in feeling alone**, it's not because you are not successful enough, or unlikable, or unlovable, or good enough, or unlucky, or unworthy.... You are not difficult or annoying... Well, you might be a little.... But not more than the rest of us! Again, there are lonely single and lonely married people (really!? Lonely married people?? BUT is that not the reason why they got married!!? Exactly! Let me tell you something: if you were lonely going into marriage thinking it would fix it, let me save you from the wrong expectation and help you understand a basic truth. You might have been alone, and now you are with someone, so you are not alone anymore, as there are 2 of you. BUT if you felt unseen and felt lonely before marriage, now when you are married and your expectation is that your spouse will see you at all times, well, that is not going to happen, because as wonderful as your spouse might be, they CANNOT meet your needs, and now you will feel even lonelier because you are with someone and still feeling that loneliness inside), There are lonely sinners and lonely saints. Yes, sin

already makes us feel isolated from God, and also then we think, oh no, what will others think of me if they only knew, so then we keep it secret. Even the Psalmist calls out about it, **Psalms 102:5-7** In my distress I groan aloud and am reduced to skin and bones. I am like a desert owl, like an owl among the ruins. I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof. **Health impacts may include:**

- Heart disease and stroke.
- Type 2 diabetes.
- Depression & anxiety.
- Self-harm and Suicidality.
- Dementia.
- Earlier death.

- ii. **Loneliness has SPIRITUAL consequences.** Who here likes bonfires!? Yeah, I love them too. What about when we take one log away from the others? How long will it still keep burning? Not long... When we are left in our spiritual lives to loneliness as well, our fire will eventually also start to dim. But as we walk with fellow believers, it helps us all to keep that flame going. When we are lonely in our spiritual walk:

- Distant from God
- Guilt (not good enough)
- Calling in Life
- Loss of Word & Prayer
- Loss of Love & Passion
- Loss of Worship

This should not surprise us because God designed us to have fellowship with Him and each other, to have community, and let's take a look at what scripture says....

B. Loneliness in the Bible

- i. **Loneliness is not new!** Loneliness is as old as creation... It's not something new that just happened after COVID: **Genesis 2:18** Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Everything up to this point in creation was called good! This is the first time that God called something not good, and that was being alone... **There is an unspoken longing in all of us, and that is to be known, to be understood, and to belong without the fear of rejection or retaliation.** We all want this because it's wired in us for relationships and to have a community around us from the very beginning. Adam & Eve messed it up a bit, but there is good news!!
- ii. **Jesus defeated loneliness!!** He first became fully man, and I wonder what that was like for Him, not being with the Father and the HS at all times, and I think that's why we see Jesus retreat many times to talk with the Father... Jesus, though, was willing to take on our fleshy bodies away from the presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit, to dwell among us humans here. But that's not all, then on the cross, Jesus took on the ultimate abandonment by being separated from the Father and the Holy Spirit and truly being alone. BUT Jesus overcame death! He overcame loneliness if we follow Him! Let's take a look at a couple of passages: **Hebrews 13:5** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." **Isaiah 41:10** ~ Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold

you with my righteous right hand. **Psalm 27:10** ~ For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in. **Matthew 28:20** ~ Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” **Deuteronomy 31:6** ~ Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” **Psalm 23:4** ~ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. **John 14:15-18** “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

- iii. **We have the Holy Spirit!!** Jesus said I will not leave you alone, but the Holy Spirit will come. Why will the Holy Spirit come? Many reasons, Pastor Stefan mentioned about 20 reasons a few weeks ago, but also so that we will not be alone!! Look at this! We will receive another helper to be with us... FOREVER! And verse 18 – I will not leave you as orphans! What a promise we have in God when we love Him and His commandments... And again, what are the commandments? to Love God and to Love People! These very things combat loneliness in our lives when we love and take care of others; loneliness is defeated through Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Next week we will continue talking about loneliness and what causes it in our lives, and we will dig deeper into these truths, but in closing...

C. Welcome the Holy Spirit: I want us to invite the Holy Spirit to walk with us!

Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit. This filling of the Holy Spirit is not just a one-time deal; this is a continual filled by the Holy Spirit, and we see this happen with Peter 3 different times in Acts. I know I need to be filled by the Spirit because I leak, I get weak, and I need the Holy Spirit in my life daily for all that I do, especially to love or care for others! There are different methods we can be filled by the Holy Spirit, and we should practice them.

- **Here is a Challenge you can do this week: Read John 14-17 and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you from those Passages...** If you need a bit of guidance, have these 3 questions ready and try to answer them as you go through those 4 chapters, take a chapter a day, sit on it, and wait on the Holy Spirit:
 1. What did you learn about God?
 2. What is His heart towards people?
 3. How many verses talk about God being with us, or His desire for us to be with each other?

Another way we are going to practice today is through worship and prayer. I am going to pray, and then the worship team will come close in the morning with a song. **PRAY**