

## Loneliness

The hinges squeaked and a loud metal clang reverberated through the neighborhood as the container door was bolted shut. The vibration ended and gave way to a silence that confirmed the finality of the moment. This was it. There was no going back. Apart from one suitcase, all my earthly belongings had been packed into this metal container and sealed tight. Soon, it would be loaded on a freighter and shipped to my new home across the Atlantic. At that moment, reality hit. Soon I would join my belongings across the ocean, far from my home. This move to Germany would distance me from loved ones and hurl me into a world that didn't share my language and customs. I felt alone.

It doesn't take a move overseas to make us feel isolated and alone. A variety of circumstances allow loneliness to take root in our lives. The loss of a loved one, the end of a cherished relationship, a new job, sickness, and military deployments are just a few of the factors that can cause us to feel lonely. Sometimes, we can even feel lonesome in the midst of many people. We may be surrounded by others who don't share our faith or idea of morality at the workplace or in our neighborhood. This loneliness can take root in our lives and grow into depression, despair and doubt.

Many of us can identify with these feelings because loneliness is something we have experienced from time to time. In his wisdom, God created us to crave the company of other people. The Lord led Adam to realize this in the Garden of Eden as he named the animals. Among the animals, there wasn't an appropriate companion. **The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."** (Genesis 2:18) We too have noticed the need for companionship in our lives. When we are isolated from our family, friends, or spouse, we yearn for those close relationships and long to be around the people who "get us".

Although earthly separations weigh heavily on our hearts and minds, there is a separation that is far worse. Jesus experienced it on the cross. Ridicule, physical pain, and even desertion by his dearest friends paled in comparison to the separation from God that Jesus endured in our place. **About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" – which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** (Matthew 27:46) Because Jesus endured the hell we deserved, we will never have to experience separation from God. Instead, we have fellowship with God through faith in Jesus. Thanks be to Jesus for this gift!

In light of God's grace, the loneliness we feel in this world is tempered by the beautiful, sustaining promises of God. As the Israelites sat in exile in Babylon far from their homeland, they may have felt that God had forgotten them. Yet, as the Lord assured the Israelites in Isaiah 49, he assures us that he will not forget us. **But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me. Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands....."** (Isaiah 49:14-16) Isaiah, through

divine inspiration, paints a picture to describe God's constant presence in our lives. We are engraved on the palms of God's hands. As we work each day, the palms of our hands are always before us. In a far greater way, God always has us before him. Like a tattoo that cannot be erased, our lives are before him as he cares for us and directs our path.

In this sinful world, friends desert us, marriages end, children move away, death steals those we love and even close knit families become divided because of sin. No matter what happens, where we go, or how strongly we may feel the pain of loneliness, God is by our side. **If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there you hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast** (Psalm 139:8-10). God promises that we are not alone here on earth. Even when distance separates us from those we love, nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39).

When tears of loneliness stream down our faces, we still have hope. We hope in the One who will never disappoint us. The Alpha and the Omega. The One who always was and always will be. And our almighty Lord is not just a silent partner, holding our hand and patting our back. Instead, as he comforts us through the promises in his Word, he reigns over heaven and earth at work for us. He is working out everything in our earthly lives so that one day he can bring us to himself in heaven. Then, those feelings of loneliness and isolation will be replaced with eternal joy and fellowship as we praise the Lamb of God for eternity.

After nearly eight years overseas, I can thank God for those moments of isolation. For it has been in those moments, removed from the people I rely on the most and feeling alone, that God has pushed me to rely solely on him. Every time I seek God in his Word, he is there to be found – sustaining me with his grace, one day at a time.

**Prayer:**

**Dear God, your love for me has never failed! In my ache of loneliness, please remind me that you continue to hold me in your powerful hand. In Jesus' name, Amen.**

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