

The Surprising Virtue of Loneliness

Dark Clouds, Silver Linings-part 1

October 5, 2014

DAY 1: Loneliness, the result from missed connection

1. We begin a new series that I've wanted to do for three years! It's called Dark Clouds, Silver Linings. We'll look at loneliness, emptiness, discouragement, depression, fear, anger, failure and a critical heart. We look at all these as "problems to solve." They are, but our Redeemer God wants to "use" these redemptively in our lives to awaken us to:

- a. How we inadvertently set ourselves up for these, and
- b. How seeking Him can turn us around from moving in these directions!

2. We'll look at the "Ecclesiastes Experience" and the "Job Experience."

3. Let's dive into loneliness.

Matthew 22:37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

³⁹ *And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*

⁴⁰ *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

4. This is Jesus' summary of the entire Old Testament!!!

a. Why do you think Jesus puts TOP priority on loving God? Does God *need* our love? Why is it important *to us(!)* to love God?

b. Why do you think Jesus puts SECOND most priority on loving people?

c. Note: some people say, "I can only love someone else if I 'love' myself." That's not what Jesus means. Jesus assumes we already "love" ourselves, meaning, we daily make sure our needs are met. Loving others means using that same intentionality to meet the needs of others (physical, relational, emotional, etc.). Loving others mean we use the same intentionality to meet their needs when we are around them!

5. Now, consider. What are some reasons we experience loneliness?

a. How would **not** seeking our deepest need for love from God, and **not** loving God as top priority create loneliness in us?

6. How would **not** loving others as we already love ourselves create loneliness in us?

DAY 2: God as "first thing pleasure"

Matthew 22:37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment."

1. Yesterday we looked at an amazing paradox. The more I love God and love others, the more my love "tank" fills. The reverse is also true. The more I wait on others (not God) to fill my love "tank" the greater the loneliness.

2. Our problem with loving God and receiving His love is not an intellectual problem. It is a priority problem.

3. In every human heart, we have an "unwritten" list of how our needs for love are "supposed" to be met. If God is not on the list, we create a *humongous* vacuum in our hearts. For the Christian, if God is not FIRST on that list, we create a *sizeable* vacuum in our hearts, one we call "loneliness."

4. What thoughts strike you from this?

5. In our hearts we have two categories for how our needs for love are to be met.

a. First thing pleasure.

Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple.

(Note: Jesus uses "hate" here, not to mean to "hate" the people in our lives. He uses "hate" in a comparatively: "Compared to your love for me, love for anyone else will pale in comparison.")

God has designed human being in such a way that we are to seek Him first, and as our top *relational* priority.

b. Second thing pleasure. Every other legitimate human pleasure is to be enjoyed as gifts from God, but these pleasures are never to take the place of God in the human heart. No "second thing pleasure" should morph into a first thing pleasure. (The O.T. calls this idolatry!)

Exodus 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.

6. What does this mean? Human beings routinely make almost anything else except God as a "first thing pleasure," and bump Him to "second thing pleasure." Sizeable loneliness ensues.

DAY 3: Loneliness, a case study

1. Solomon was king and the wealthiest man alive. He could have "anything." Solomon tried all kinds of ways to "make life work." Today, we'll look at marriage and the sexual relationship.

1 Kings 11:3 He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray.

(Note: "concubines" were wives who could not inherit from their husband's estate).

Ecclesiastes 2:8 (Solomon writes) "I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces; I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, man's delight."

2. At one point, Solomon had one wife. Over the span of many years that number proliferated. What reasons can you think of as to why Solomon kept adding wives?

3. For the men reading this story, you may wonder what it would be like to have such a "harem" available to you. We don't wonder about the effect on Solomon. He tells us, later in Ecclesiastes.

Eccl. 7:26 "And I found more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters; he who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her."

a. What did Solomon discover in loving a woman?

b. Solomon discovered that no woman comes "drama-free." In fact this was repeated 999 times.

²⁷ Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher (Solomon), adding one thing to another to find the sum, ²⁸ which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, **but a woman among all these I have not found.**

²⁹ Behold, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices.

c. Solomon refers to his father, David as a real man. But even with 1,000 women at this fingertips, his heart was filled like he once imagined it could be! He is dumb-founded by this truth!

4. Even in the best of marriages, there are times of personal loneliness. There are things you want your partner to understand and they don't, joys you want to share with them and they understate your joy, or sorrows you want to them to bear with you and they are too busy. In these ways and countless others, you will experience pangs of loneliness. THIS IS TO BE EXPECTED!

5. What strikes you most from today's study?

DAY 4: Loneliness grows deeper the more we trust people to fill our loneliness tank

1. Several days ago, we introduced "first thing pleasures" and "second thing pleasures."

a. First thing pleasure-- finding our deepest needs for love *primarily* met in God, and in our relationship with Him.

b. Second thing pleasure - find our deepest needs to be met *secondarily* in appropriate human pleasures and relationships.

2. Our sin problem is that we *naturally* reverse first thing pleasure and second thing pleasure. We naturally pursue our needs for love *primarily* through people, and *secondarily* through God. The results set us up for greater loneliness!

a. We miss out on the love God has for us. We are not *depending* on God for the lion share of love we need.

b. We inadvertently add *pressure* to our relationships. Now, certain people "need" to come through for us. If they don't our love "tank" drops.

c. The inevitable results of "a" and "b" are anger and conflict.

3. Let's look at some verses that highlight different aspects of this:

Galatians 1:10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

4. Paul asks himself two important questions! How do his questions relate to our topic for today?

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man lays a snare, but he who trusts in the LORD is safe.

5. The writer of Proverbs uses "the fear of man" as meaning, "Whom are we really trusting for our needs to be met? People or God?"

a. What will happen if our real hope is in people? What does he say will happen?

b. If our REAL hope for love is in God instead of people, how does the writer describe the effect of that hope? What is it that's "kept safe?"

John 2:23 Now when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did; ²⁴ but Jesus did not trust himself to them, ²⁵ because he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man.

6. How does Jesus illustrate what we've been talking about? What is His real hope for love? What is His "first thing pleasure?"

7. Who's someone you've made a first thing pleasure? Do you see the pressure you put on them?

DAY 5: Loneliness: "Of course we're homesick!"

1. There is another kind of loneliness that is inescapable. It will come knocking on your door no matter how good your spouse is, your kids are, and your friends are. It will come knocking on your door even when you're doing well with God as first thing pleasure!

2. Before we look at this type of loneliness, when you were a kid did you ever experience being homesick? Maybe when you went off to camp, college, or the military? What was it like?

3. Christians experience a kind of homesickness. This world cannot fill my "lonely" heart.

4. Here's a stellar example of people who "get it," that this world is not their home, but home is coming!

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

¹⁴ *For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.*

¹⁵ *If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.*

¹⁶ *But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.*

5. Until we get to heaven, we're not "home." Our redeemer God uses this "homesickness" (loneliness) to draw our eyes forward and to increase our **anticipation** for the joy that's coming. Even more, that anticipation for joy, is intended to also become present joy! Underline words or phrases in #5 that resonate with you.

6. When I was a kid I went to camp. I went on the train--it was fun! I went canoeing--fun! I did archery--fun! I went swimming in the mountain lake--fun!

But at night? Homesick! I was surrounded by everything a kid could want, except for one thing--deep connection. Being homesick gave me a greater appreciation for my parents, my siblings, my friends, etc.

7. In a similar way, God uses our loneliness to point us heavenward and outward to others!

8. Jot down what you want to remember about loneliness from this week's study.