

Loneliness in the Church, Part 2 – The Way Out

Having spoken about all these areas which cause so much pain for people, what can we do to combat loneliness in the church? The first step is to realise that one of the problems which causes many to feel lonely and isolated in the church is negative speaking and negative thinking. Both of these things are a choice that we make moment by moment. If we refuse to be negative, put on a smile and speak cheerfully you will see your relationships change at high speed.

The second thing that can be done to combat loneliness in the church is communication. Since you have made the decision to be positive rather than negative, see how you feel when you take things one step further, try saying "Good Morning" to people, especially the bus driver if you travel on public transport. A simple greeting like that can literally change a person's countenance a cause them to have a much better day than they may otherwise have done.

When you get off the bus, thank the driver, the more frequently you do this the more it will lift **your** countenance and cause you to feel much more like smiling the whole day through. If and when you see somebody you know – maybe from the church or someone you simply see very often, greet them with a beaming smile and say "Good Morning". It can work wonders for you, to say nothing of how it could affect the other person.

When you sit at a table in church with people you know, engage them in conversation if it seems a reasonable opportunity so to do, show that you really care about what is going on in their lives, share a joke with them, though not the same one every time. It will then not be long before when they see you heading in their direction in church, they will invite you to sit at table with them.

Psalm 100 speaks about how we can come into the presence of God and know that He hears us, the way it suggests is to begin your private time of prayer every morning with a few minutes praise. If you do this the amount of time you spend in praise to God will greatly increase, without you realising it. Thank Him for your salvation, for revealing himself to you, for making you to be a son to Him, yes we all have the status of sons in Christ Jesus.

It will probably come about that after a while God will lay people on your heart that He wants you to pray for, and you can then have the joy of seeing the changes that happen in his/her life as you have been bringing them before God in prayer. When the right time of the day comes, send them an e-mail encouraging them in The Lord, or make a telephone call to them just to see how they are, this can be such a blessing to lonely people.

Offer to come round one evening (or morning if they do not go out to work) for a coffee and a chat, so you and they can spend some time together. If you are a member of a home group the enemy would like so much to make you feel isolated and a complete outsider, do not allow him to make you feel like that, deliberately ignore such attempts and get involved.

In the group and/or the discussion, allowing time for everyone else to share their thoughts as well as your own.

On any given subject in the remotest way connected with Christianity God will have given each person in the group a measure of truth, nobody has the whole truth, but we can all have a part of it, then when all these people come together and share what God has taught them on the subject you will then all go away with a greater understanding of the subject than you did before the meeting started.

Maybe what you have brought out is not correct, allow them with gentleness to correct you and if you can understand their perspective on the subject so much the better, there is no call to take the hump and be hurt because someone has corrected you, who knows, the next time the group meet for a discussion it may be your turn to gently correct someone in the group yourself. Do it with gentleness, love and understanding though.

If you get the opportunity to bring a teaching to the group one evening, remember that 20 minutes at the beginning of the meeting is more than enough to explain your views on the chosen passage, after that open it up for discussion, being careful to give everyone the opportunity of having their say. The attention span of most people is estimated at 20 to 30 minutes in a meeting like this.

It is much better to be short than to be too long, as Tommy Cooper would have said, always leave them wanting more. It would always be a good idea to make a list of members in your group, divide the list up into men and women, and in each case suggest that the person at the top of the list should pray (if only for five minutes a day) for the person named below them on the list, this continue until the bottom, then the person at the bottom pray each day for the person at the top and everybody will be covered in prayer on a daily basis.

Your leadership team need your constant prayers that God will give them wisdom to hear what He is saying to them and to be courageous enough to obey Him in full, pray for their health and that they will prosper even as their souls prosper in The Lord (3 John chapter 1 verse 2). If you continue in this manner then you are well on the road to seeing a great blessing from God come upon your church and all its members.

Remember in every conversation both parties should have roughly as much opportunity to talk as each other. A Christian counsellor once said "You have one mouth and two ears, therefore spend twice as much listening as you do speaking. Whilst the other person is speaking it may be that God will give you a word of knowledge about the person, it may be just so you know better how to pray for them, it may not be the right time to tell them that you know what you do about them, getting the timing of this wrong can be disastrous.

If the other person wants to talk about a problem they are experiencing, listen and listen good, sometimes just talking about a problem you have might be the trigger for God to reveal the solution to the person, without you having to say a word. Most importantly, it is fine to talk to them if they want to chat but it is not advisable for them to come round to your home, as this can easily get out of hand, meet them either where they live, in the church or a venue in town where they would find it easy to talk. If you are the listener it is always important for you to be in control of the time and the place of meeting.

If God has given you the gift of being able to listen and comfort people with problems then He will also have given you the ability to weep with them in their troubles but not to be burdened with their problems yourself. If the church is having an outing it may well be of benefit to you to join them on this outing. At worst it will be a good way for others to get to know you better.

Of course you still have to go home alone and get up the next morning alone, but at least you will have made the greater part of your day a blessing and pleasure for yourself and a blessing and treasure for at least one other person also, and in so doing you will certainly be pleasing God.

Pastors and Elders, if you notice that someone has not been attending church for a couple of weeks and you do not know why, phone them, to see how they are, offer to go round to see them and chat about anything they are having difficulties, don't forget that Hebrews chapter 10 verse 25 which reads: "And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."

If we are neglecting the meetings together then you are opening yourself up to spiritual attack. Have you ever seen a leopard hunting a Deer or a Zebra? You will no doubt have observed that the first thing the Cheetah will do is to try to isolate the victim from the rest of the pack, once he has done this he can go in for the kill. Remember there are only two kinds of people who are in greatest danger in a battle.

These are the front runners (the leaders) and those who lag behind. Barnabas is remembered as the son of encouragement; if you encourage others you will yourself be encouraged and perhaps even have a similar reputation. If you bless others in this way you will be blessed also, and that way two people will be blessed, not just one.

In all things never neglect or be distracted from your personal time of fellowship with God; that is priority NO 1 for every Christian. If you get that right everything else will fall into place, a good work without it is a work of the flesh. Matthew chapter 7 verses 21 to 23 reads: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me,

you workers of lawlessness." They did the good works right enough, but they neglected the relationship. Make sure you do not do the same.