



ONE HOPE

30 Daily Devotions for
Overcoming Loneliness

North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry



30 Daily Devotions for Overcoming Loneliness

Compiled by Dr. Mark Smith

CONNECTION COMMUNITY CHRIST

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in **one hope** of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

– Ephesians 4:4-6 (NKJV)

North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry



It is the mission of North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry (NCBAM) to provide “help for the journey” to aging adults in ways that help them maintain their independence. The ministry focuses on providing referrals and information, on connecting the aging and their families with resources to meet needs, and on coordinating practical ministries.



This book is an NCBAM Christ the Cornerstone Project – an intentional outreach to aging adults and their caregivers based on the belief that Christ is truly the cornerstone for living. NCBAM is concerned with the total needs of the aging and places a priority on individual spiritual growth through biblical understanding.

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Introduction

By Dr. Mark Smith

We are so glad this devotion book is in your hand! There have been many people all over North Carolina praying for this moment.

This easy-to-use daily devotional is written to help you overcome feelings of loneliness. As you open your Bible, we invite you to ask God to speak to you through His perfect Word. We encourage you to read each day's devotion and allow the Holy Spirit to heal you and give you abundant life. He is more than able to take your loneliness and isolation and transform it into a one-on-one experience with Him. In other words, solitude: the type Jesus enjoyed as He withdrew Himself from people and the demands of ministry to be alone with the Father and pray.

Authors from all across North Carolina have provided a short commentary for each day's Scripture passage to help you think about and answer the questions provided. They have also included "Action Steps" to challenge and encourage you to take a few small steps as the Lord empowers you to overcome the isolation and loneliness you are experiencing. We've left room on most pages for you to make reflective notes or respond to the action steps.

Hope Line volunteers and staff at North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry (NCBAM) are praying for you and are here to walk with you through this part of your journey. Please feel free to call the NCBAM Hope Line at 866-578-4673 (866-578-HOPE). We look forward to receiving your call!

Dr. Mark Smith is a member of NCBAM's advisory team and also serves on the ministry's One Hope task force. Mark is a senior consultant for family evangelism and discipleship with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Lonely, But Not Alone

By Dr. Michael C. Blackwell

“The Spirit is the proof that He will never forsake His children in this world or the world to come.”

The irises my mother planted in the yard of my childhood home are, in my mind, forever in bloom. I still hear the ending-shift whistle at the mill just a short distance away: it often coincided with mother’s call to dinner. My parents made sure that I played on the mill-sponsored Little League team and I was an active Boy Scout. My memories of growing up and playing along Lander Avenue in Gastonia are joyful.

Not far from our home was the church my family attended and where my father led the choir. I was active at Flint-Groves Baptist Church from the time I crawled to the day I moved my membership to serve my first church. I was a member of “cradle roll” department and was led to the Lord by Pastor Love Dixon when I was eight years old. I was ordained and licensed to preach at Flint-Groves. It was here that my mother and father helped plant deep in my heart a love for Jesus and His church.

An only child, I was fortunate to be the center of Viola’s and Clitus’ world. My mother encouraged me, and helped build a strong self-esteem within me. People often compliment me on my voice. Well, that is both a gift from God and from my father, who had a deep baritone voice. Although he spent 32 years as a life insurance salesman, his great love



“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”

– Romans 8:16-17 NIV

was music and voice. On Sunday afternoons, he sat me down in front of a Wollensak tape recorder and I practiced diction and delivery. He would play back the recordings as we listened and he critiqued.

I think of my parents often and miss them today. But they are never far from me. They helped shape me into the person I am today. I am their heir. I am a living legacy to who they were and will always be.

Paul wrote in the Book of Romans (8:16-17 NIV): “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”

Being heirs brings certainty, confidence in who we are and what our future holds. As an heir, we are entitled to all that God offers. Through the Spirit, we share with God in this life both the good times and times of suffering. We are never alone. The Spirit assures us He is always with us. The Spirit is the proof that God will never forsake His children in this world or the world to come.

This year, I turn 78 years old. Now more than ever, I enjoy regular moments of solitude. It is in these quiet moments that I am drawn closer to God — like a child who crawls up into the lap of a loving father. I feel the distance between God and me lessen. It is as if His embrace is tightening around me and one day there will be no more gap and I will share in His glory forever.

For Reflection

1. What memories do you hold of your parents that shaped your life?
2. What gifts, talents, or hobbies can you share with others to impart your own legacy?

Action Steps

1. Set aside time each day for solitude with God. To help with consistency, develop a ritual around this special time.
2. After your time of solitude with God, take a moment to write about what you felt or experienced.

Making Peace with Your Past

By Dr. Sandy C. Gregory

“Our love for Christ is the only sufficient motive that will enable us to make peace with our past.”

As we age, we often become more spiritual. Our focus becomes relational and we evaluate past and present relationships. We think about things that have happened in the past. We may have regrets because we caused something or reacted wrongly. Regrets can cause feelings of failure, disappointment, sorrow, guilt, shame, and blame. To regret something is to wish it had never happened. Regret can paralyze us both spiritually and emotionally.

Peter the Apostle, original name Simeon son of Jonah, was a disciple of Jesus who had a haunting regret. The night that Jesus was arrested and taken to Caiaphas, the high priest, Peter is said to have followed at a distance. After arriving, a fire was kindled and Peter sat down near the light. A servant girl noticed Peter and identified him as being with Jesus. Peter denied it and said that he “did not know Jesus.” Later another person saw Peter and said “You also are one of them.” But Peter a second time denied knowing Jesus saying, “Man I am not.” Then a third time, Peter was identified as being with Jesus and being a Galilean. Peter’s response was, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. As Jesus looked at Peter, Peter remembered



DAY 2

*“He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.”
– John 21:17*

what Jesus had predicted to him earlier that evening (“Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”) Peter went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:54-62)

How could Peter ever forget his actions that night? Tradition says that afterwards Simon Peter would cry whenever he heard a rooster crow. And that he would wake up each night to pray during the hour he had denied Jesus. Peter’s regret seemed greater than letting down another person, for he let down God in his triple denial of knowing Jesus.

The story of Peter does not end in sorrow, guilt, or disappointment. As recorded in the gospel of John 21:4-17, after Jesus’ resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee and confronted Peter. Three times Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” Peter declares his love for Jesus each time. Just as Peter had denied Jesus three times, Jesus asked Peter to affirm his love three times. Jesus tells Peter each time to continue on with His ministry and work. Jesus’ commands helped Peter to move on without the burdens of guilt and regret. Likewise, our love for Christ is the only sufficient motive that will enable us to make peace with our past and stay the course in the future.

For Reflection

1. Why do you think Peter denied knowing Jesus three times?
2. How do you think Peter felt about his words and actions in the aftermath of his decision?

Action Steps

1. List your sources of regret and then pray Psalm 32, 51, or 130 as a way to think about God’s blessings to you. Dwell in God’s grace and forgiveness.
2. If your regrets are because of your actions toward someone, seek forgiveness and repair the relationship if possible. Regardless of the other person’s response, by asking forgiveness you can know that you closed the circle of regret allowing yourself to move forward.

God's Image Bearer

By Dr. Mark Smith

"You are God's special creation and He wants a special relationship with you."

I love the Words of Jesus in the book of Matthew when He says, "Consider the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them." (Matthew 6:26 CSB)

Jesus' illustration reminds me of a time when I was on vacation at Myrtle Beach. I was enjoying the sunshine, ocean breeze, and sand between my toes when unexpectedly a seagull came up and sat beside me. It seemed nervous; it was shaking and I could tell it had not eaten in several days. I was concerned and asked the little bird what was wrong and he said, "Could you help me? I haven't had anything to eat in over a week, I am starving and feel sick. I am having so much trouble getting food and I don't know what to do. Could you give me something to eat?"

Of course, I am kidding. That little bird did not come up to me asking for food. We talked about other things but not about food (again, just kidding). This passage tells us how our loving Heavenly Father takes care of not only birds but every animal He has created. God takes care of the animals because they are His creation. He is responsible for them and has promised He will provide for their needs. However, when it comes to man, He takes care of us in a special way. That's why Jesus follows up with the words, "Aren't you worth more than they?"



DAY

3

*"And God said,
Let us make man
in our image,
after our likeness:
and let them have
dominion over the
fish of the sea, and
over the fowl of
the air, and over
the cattle, and
over all the earth,
and over every
creeping thing
that creepeth
upon the earth. So
God created man
in his own image,
in the image of
God created he
him; male and
female created he
them." – Genesis
1:26-27*

Jesus brings up a good question. What are we worth to God? To find the answer we need to read Genesis 2:7. It says, "The LORD God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils." Scripture describes man as being created much differently than the rest of creation. The eternal God breathed His life-giving breath into His image bearer. Nothing else in all of creation was given life this way. King David helps us see God's special affection toward mankind. He says, "You (God) made him (man) little less than God and crowned him with glory and honor." (Psalm 8:5 CSB) Therefore, the answer to Jesus' question is most definitely, "Yes!"

Man is God's special creation. You are God's special creation and He wants a special relationship with you. He wants to give you life in Him now and life with Him for all eternity. The Lord makes this possible through His Son Jesus. God sent His Son to offer "the way" to make life now and for eternity possible with Him.

For anyone who has put faith and trust in Christ, and has made Him the Lord of his or her life, eternal life is not only a future hope: it is a present possession. Therefore, since believers possess this incredible gift, living each day as an image bearer becomes more about daily surrender (Luke 9:23), constant abiding (John 15:5) and being filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

For Reflection

1. Go to a passage in your Bible that has spoken to you in the past—whether it was last week or 30 years ago. Now, read it. Read it again. Read it a 3rd and a 4th time. What is God saying to you today about this passage?
2. Is it different than when you read it before?

Action Steps

1. Share with a family member, someone from your church, or a neighbor what the Lord is saying to you now about the passage you read.
2. Write out this Bible passage on paper and place it where you will see it regularly.
3. Make a list of other Bible passages the Lord has used to speak to you.

The Attributes of God

By Dr. Mark Smith

“Recognizing that God never changes, is all powerful, all knowing, always present and infinitely faithful means that in relationship with Him we can find everything our hearts need.”

We have a lot in common with God as His image bearers. But, at the same time, God is much different than us. Therefore, what do His attributes have to do with us and how do they affect our lives? Before answering that question, let's review a few of God's attributes:

God Never Changes

“Because I, the LORD, have not changed, you descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed.”
(Malachi 3:6 CSB)

God is “Immutable” (unchanging over time or unable to be changed)

God Is All Powerful

“The heavens were made by the word of the LORD, and all the stars, by the breath of His mouth.”
(Psalm 33:6 CSB)

God is “Omnipotent.” (having unlimited power; able to do anything)

God Is All Knowing

“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.”
(Isaiah 46:10a NIV)

God is “Omniscient.” (knowing everything)



*“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”
– Genesis 1:27*

God Is Everywhere

“Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I live at the eastern horizon or settle at the western limits, even there your hand will lead me; your right hand will hold on to me.” (Psalm 139:7-10 CSB)

God is “Omnipresent.” (present everywhere at the same time)

God Is Faithful

“Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments.” (Deuteronomy 7:9 NIV)

God is “Faithful.” (loyal, constant, and steadfast)

Recognizing that God never changes, is all powerful, all knowing, always present and infinitely faithful means that in relationship with Him we can find everything our hearts need. God never forgets anything. He never fails to do what He said He would do. The Lord never changes His mind or reneges on a promise. Ultimately, His faithfulness pours out from His unending love. Therefore, we can trust Paul’s word that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him.” (Romans 8:28 NIV)

For Reflection

1. What other attributes of God can you name?
2. Of all His attributes, which do you feel most in need of right now?

Action Steps

1. Write a prayer to God about one of His attributes. Here is an example: “Lord, thank you for your faithfulness. I rest in you knowing that you never change and you keep your promises.”
2. Next, put the written prayer in a place where you will regularly see it.

The Good News

By Dr. Mark Smith

“Jesus Christ knows you and loves you.”

What comes to mind when I mention the name Billy Graham? Some would say he was “America’s Pastor” while others described him as the “Pope of Protestant America.” Richard Nixon was quoted as saying, Billy Graham was “the most able and the best trained man for the job probably in American history,” Without any doubt, we can all agree that God used Billy Graham to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

Billy Graham had a passion for telling others about God’s gracious gift of salvation through His Son. Even today, after his death, his legacy and ministry lives on. With only a few keystrokes on the World Wide Web you can find the answer of “How to Know Jesus.” Here are the simple steps Billy Graham’s ministry shares:

Step 1

God loves you and has a plan for you! The Bible says, “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, [Jesus Christ], that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 NIV)

Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” — a complete life full of purpose. (John 10:10 ESV)



DAY

5

*“I have come so
that they may
have life and have
it in abundance.”
– John 10:10 CSB*

Step 2

Here's the problem: man is sinful and separated from God. We have all done, thought or said bad things, which the Bible calls "sin." The Bible says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23 NIV)

The result of sin is death, spiritual separation from God. (Romans 6:23)

The good news?

Step 3

God sent His Son to die for your sins! Jesus died in our place so we could have a relationship with God and be with Him forever. "God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8 NIV)

But it didn't end with His death on the cross. He rose again and still lives! "Christ died for our sins... He was buried... He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:3-4 CSB)

Jesus is the only way to God. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6 NIV)

Step 4

Would you like to receive God's forgiveness? We can't earn salvation; we are saved by God's grace when we have faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. All you have to do is believe you are a sinner, that Christ died for your sins, and ask His forgiveness. Then turn from your sins: that's called repentance. Jesus Christ knows you and loves you. What matters to Him is the attitude of your heart, your honesty. We suggest praying the prayer below to accept Christ as your Savior.

Pray now (prayer from the Billy Graham Institute)

"Dear God, I know I'm a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe that He died for my sin and that you raised Him to life. I want to trust Him as my Savior and follow Him as Lord, from this day forward. Guide my life and help me to do your will. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen."

For Reflection

1. Did you pray this prayer today? If so, praise the Lord and welcome to God's great family. We're excited that you have made the decision to make Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior. This is the most important and greatest day of your life!
2. Have you prayed a prayer similar to this in the past? If so, as best as you can remember, would you write the date you surrendered to Christ and made Him the Lord of your life in the space provided below?

Action Steps

1. I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ on _____ .
2. Please call the NCBAM Hope Line at 866-578-4673(866-578-HOPE) and let us celebrate with you.

The Glory of Being Alone

By Rev. Steve Clark

**“Loneliness expresses the pain of being alone...
Solitude expresses the glory of being alone.”**

Fear is a great catalyst for isolation. Fear focuses your thoughts on yourself and consumes you with, “What am I going to do now!” We all feel it. Think about a time you received bad news, when family said it was time to move, when your money ran out before the month ended, or when a relationship disintegrated. Having had five heart attacks, open heart surgery, 14 stents and a pacemaker really sets me up for the shock of fear that accompanies every twinge of chest pain. Fear comes to all of us in thousands of ways, but always with the same result: isolation.

James 5:17 says that “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.” So, did this great man of God ever fear? Read 1 Kings 19:1-10. What? Was this not the man who had prophesied a drought, challenged a nation to repent, faced down 450 prophets, and ultimately outrun Ahab’s chariot to Jezreel? “O LORD, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers . . . I only am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” (1 Kings 19:4,10 KJV) Fear brings on isolation, isolation gives way to loneliness and loneliness to despair. If It happened to this great man of God, how in the world are we to overcome loneliness?

In his book, “The Eternal Now,” Paul Tillich wrote, “Loneliness expresses the pain of being alone.” That



DAY

6

*“And as he lay
and slept under
a juniper tree,
behold, then an
angel touched
him, and said
unto him, Arise
and eat.”*

– 1 Kings 19:6

pain, produced by a fear we did not overcome, now becomes the heart of our problem: a loneliness that separates us from hope. But surprisingly Tillich continues, “. . . solitude expresses the glory of being alone.” What is the difference between loneliness and solitude? One destroys hope; the other gives birth to hope. One goes under a juniper tree and loses all hope while the other goes to a cave and encounters the living God. Both are full of fear, isolation, and loneliness. Yet one wanders away in despair and the other emerges in purpose. What is the difference?

Instead of the loneliness of the juniper tree, Elijah finds solitude in a cave on Mt. Horeb. That solitude allows God to speak to him in a still small voice. That voice could have never been heard over the din of a mind swirling in fear. But there on the mountain the Lord passed by. Not in the great wind or the mighty earthquake, but in a still small voice. It is interesting that God doesn't come to comfort or to show pity on Elijah, but to challenge him. When fear drives you to isolation, the word of God comes as a still small voice with the impact of an earth-shattering blast of a trumpet saying, “Stop the pity party, dry up the tears, get back on the horse, do what I say. Oh, by the way, I have many others that will be with you.”

If fear is holding you captive, there is one solution, solitude in the Word of God. There are a lot of things that are true, but there is only one Truth, that is Christ. Ask yourself, “Am I lonely because of my circumstances or my fears?” If fear is the source of loneliness, first confess that fear is not of the Lord. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:7 KJV) The evil one is using fear to isolate you from the task God has for you. Then, seek the words of God in the Bible, which is full of hope and challenge. In solitude with Him read the word until it speaks to your situation. And finally, in the solitude of prayer hear the voice of the Lord, do exactly what He says, and the Spirit of Him who saved you and the faithful service of those called by Him will help you accomplish all that He requests.

For Reflection

1. Are you lonely because of your circumstances?
2. Are you lonely because of what you fear?

Action Steps

1. Confess your fear(s) to the Lord.
2. Read 1 Kings 19:11-18 and be ready to hear God's still small voice.

The God Who Sees Me

By Carol Layton

“Hagar must have felt listened to for the first time in her life, for she responded, “You are the God who sees me.”

Turmoil, jealousy, abuse, disappointments – Hagar experienced them all. And when it came to experiencing isolation and loneliness, she literally found herself wandering in a wilderness—not once, but twice.

Hagar was an Egyptian woman and a slave to Sarai, the wife of Abram. Sarai was childless and eager for God to get on with His plan to give offspring to Abram. So she took matters into her own hands and asked Abram to conceive a child with her handmaid Hagar. Abram obliged.

Sarai’s plan for a surrogate didn’t go as envisioned. As Hagar’s belly grew round and she felt life stirring inside her, trouble began to brew between her and Sarai. Hagar showed disrespect for her mistress and in turn Sarai treated Hagar harshly—so harshly that young, pregnant Hagar imagined any place must be better. She fled to the desert.

The “angel of Jehovah” found Hagar in the wilderness and began to question her. “Where did you come from?” “Where are you going?” Hagar was more accustomed to demands than questions. She must have felt listened to for the first time in her life, for she responded, “You are the God who sees me.” The angel instructs her to return, to



“[Hagar] gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: ‘You are the God who sees me,’ for she said, ‘I have now seen the One who sees me.’” – Genesis 16:13 NIV

submit to Sarai, and to name her son Ishmael because, he says, "Ishmael" means "God listens."

Having been listened to, having felt seen as a real person, Hagar returned to Hebron. For the next 14 years, her mistress (now Sarah with an H) appears to tolerate Hagar and her son Ishmael. But then Sarah gives birth to her own baby. Not wanting Ishmael to share an inheritance with Isaac, Sarah appeals to her husband (now Abraham). At the feast to celebrate Isaac's weaning, she asks Abraham to "get rid of that slave woman and her son."

Abraham was distressed but God assured him that Ishmael would be made into a nation also. So, Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael packing with "some food and a skin of water." And for the second time, Hagar finds herself wandering in the wilderness. When the water was gone, she put Ishmael under a bush and walked away so as not to see him die. Hagar, "that slave woman" sat down and began to sob.

Then, the God who listens, who sees, who cares, again appears to Hagar. He questions her, "What's the matter, Hagar?" We're not told how Hagar responded but she must have poured out her heart about her son for God's next words were "Do not be afraid. God has heard Ishmael crying... I will make him into a great nation."

God then "opened her eyes" and Hagar saw a "well of water." Hagar and Ishmael drank and were refreshed. God was with Ishmael and he grew up an archer in the wilderness of Paran. And Hagar found a nice Egyptian wife for her son.

For Reflection

1. Hagar received a deep revelation of God's compassion as she was swept into the lives of Sarah and Abraham. Why do you think God chose these questions to ask Hagar? (Where did you come from? Where are you going? What's the matter?)
2. Sarah viewed Hagar only as "that slave woman"—a solution to a problem and later, a nemesis. But to God, Hagar was fully loved—worthy of listening to and seeing with compassion. Are you defined by how you think others perceive you? Or by how God perceives you?

Action Steps

1. Knowing that God cares about whatever concerns you, imagine God asking you, "What's the matter?" Close your eyes, take a deep breath, realize that He hears your every breath and that He is intimately acquainted with all your ways (Psalm 139:3). Then, answer.
2. Knowing that God can open our eyes to solutions we may miss when suffering or alone, ask Him to open your eyes to solutions and to the reality of His presence.

Just a Little Talk

By Whitney Brooks

“Feeling seen and heard is a basic human need, something we take for granted at times.”

Inspiration winds its way to us in so many ways: prayer, scripture, poetry, art. Recently I found myself humming a tried and true gospel number, “Just a Little Talk with Jesus”—you know the song. It’s a catchy tune, and that day I could not get it out of my head.

I’ve heard that the best way to get a song unstuck from our mental radio is to actually listen to it, so that’s exactly what I did. Behold the power of the Internet!

As this beloved hymn wound its way through my headphones, something sounded different. This song, which I’ve sung too many times to count, made a fresh impression. One line in particular pinched me: “Just a little talk with Jesus made me whole.”

I listened again. And again, and again. I leaned back, eyes closed, and visualized the words of the song. My brain and my spirit formed their own chorus, singing a connection between the lyrics to this classic southern hymn and to NCBAM’s Hope Line.

The Hope Line exists to serve you if you are dealing with social isolation or feelings of loneliness. Hope Line volunteers really listen to callers and strive to help them feel whole, the same way Jesus does in that treasured gospel tune.

As children of God, we were created to be connected and in community, to be in company



DAY

8

*“God has surely
listened and has
heard my prayer.”*
– Psalms 66:19
NIV

with others. Feeling seen and heard is a basic human need, something we take for granted at times. Smartphones and computers provide the illusion of constant connection, but they are no replacement for good old-fashioned conversation. Give us a call at 866-578-4673. We're here to listen!

For Reflection

1. Who is the best listener you know? What makes this person a good listener?
2. Why do you think being listened to increases our feelings of wholeness?

Action Steps

1. Talk to Jesus, tell Him all about it. Then spend some time listening.
2. Call the NCBAM Hope Line at 866-578-4673. We'd love to hear from you!

The Good Shepherd: My Shepherd

By Dr. Mark Smith

“God loves you deeply and cares tremendously for you.”

Not long ago I had an opportunity to go on a mission trip to Israel. Visiting the sites where Jesus lived and walked was humbling. Going to locations described in the Bible was amazing. I can honestly say that going to Israel forever changed the way I read the Bible and see the Jewish people.

With all that I saw and experienced in Israel, there is one characteristic of the country and landscape I did not anticipate. Many parts of Israel are desert and in short supply of water. Especially in the southern region, the terrain is rocky and has little vegetation. Perhaps what took me by surprise most was that, even today, shepherding livestock is a viable occupation. I could not believe in this harsh environment, sheep and goats could be sustained and even thrive.

The one verse that kept coming to mind when I saw shepherds in Israel with their flocks was Psalm 23:1. Let's look deeply into the verse,

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

Psalm 23:1

Why would God want to be called our Shepherd? In ancient Israel, a shepherd's work was considered to be the lowest of all occupations. A shepherd's tasks were endless. He had to ensure the flocks had adequate food and water. To do this, the shepherd would sometimes have to spend weeks away from



“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

– Psalm 23:1

home leading the animals to new pasture lands. He protected them from predators and took care of them when they were injured. Sounds a lot like being a parent.

If a family needed someone to tend their flocks, it was always the youngest son, like David, who got this unpleasant task of being the family shepherd. It is truly remarkable that the Lord, the King of the Universe, would stoop so low and choose to be called "Shepherd."

But doesn't this description perfectly describe God? Like the shepherd, the Lord guides, protects and provides for us. Not only that, He sent His Son Jesus to put on human flesh to live among us. Jesus clearly speaks of Himself as the Good Shepherd. He says, "I am the Good Shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me." (John 10:14 NIV) In Hebrews, the writer describes Jesus as "that great Shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13:20 NIV) and Peter refers to Jesus as the "Chief Shepherd." (1 Peter 5:4 NIV)

But you may be thinking, "Jesus lives in heaven. He no longer physically lives here on earth." This, of course, is true. However, 50 days after Jesus ascended into heaven the Holy Spirit came to reside in every person who puts their faith and trust in Christ. That's why Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost" and in Ephesians 1:13, "Ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise."

God loves you deeply and cares tremendously for you. As a believer, you are His child. As His child, you are given the Holy Spirit. As a recipient of the Holy Spirit, you are His possession. (1 Corinthians 3:23) Because you are His possession, you will be cared for. Therefore, when God, the loving Shepherd, cares for you, He will provide for all your needs and "you shall not want."

For Reflection

1. Is there any need God cannot meet?
2. Has God ever met a need in your life?

Action Steps

1. Write a prayer to the Lord and thank Him for how He met a need in your life.
2. Before the day is over, call a friend or family member and share today's Scripture reading. Tell them when and how God met a need in your life.

How Jesus Used Truth to Overcome the Lies of Loneliness

By Dr. Greg Powell

“Satan wants you to believe that you are alone and that your loneliness is unique to you. This is a lie.”

Satan has an eye for our weak moments. He comes to deceive and to lead us away from the Truth. He comes to destroy hope. He came to tempt Jesus at the very height of His hunger and loneliness. Jesus hadn't had human contact for a month and a half and was hungry from His fasting. When Satan tempted Jesus, he did not break His fast or tempt the Father. Instead He relied on the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures. He showed us how to defend ourselves from the lies of Satan. Satan will come to you in your weak moments and tell you lies. He will tell you that you are not loved. He will tell you that you are worthless. He will tell you that God has abandoned you. None of these things are true. Just as Jesus relied on the Spirit and the Scriptures to defeat Satan, so can you. Also remember that Jesus was never alone in the desert. He was being led by the Holy Spirit.

In John 16:5-7, Jesus tells His disciples that He is leaving to go back to the Father. This filled the disciples with loneliness and sorrow. In order to combat their sorrow, Jesus gives them the promise of the indwelling of the Spirit. He tells them it is to their advantage for Him to leave and the Spirit to come. Think about that! Jesus tells His disciples, and



“Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”

– Matthew 4:11

us, that it is better to have the Spirit dwelling inside of you than to have Him physically walking with us. The connection you have with the Father through the Spirit is more advantageous than the connection that the original disciples had through physically being with Jesus.

In Matthew 4:1-11, we read how Jesus fought against loneliness with His knowledge of the Scriptures. When Satan tempted Him, Jesus answered back with Scriptures He had memorized. The problem with loneliness is that you feel alone. Not just alone in the sense that no one is around to care for you but that you are uniquely alone in a way that no one else is. In our loneliness, it is easy to assume that we are the only ones who suffer this way and that this suffering does not end. This is not the truth. The truth is that the Bible is full of people who struggled with loneliness. David writes about his loneliness in Psalm 22 and 27. David defeated his loneliness with hope. Not simply hoping everything would turn out okay, but rather a hope built on the truth of God's faithfulness. In Psalm 22:4-5 he writes, "In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame." (ESV)

Satan wants you to believe that you are alone and that your loneliness is unique to you. This is a lie. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus is with us even until the end of this age (Matthew 28:20). The Scriptures tell us we are sealed with the Spirit and He will never leave us (Ephesians 1:13-14). The Scriptures are full of stories of our spiritual heroes who suffered through loneliness but never lost faith. Do not allow Satan to steal your joy. Lift your eyes and know that God loves you and is near you now and forever.

For Reflection

1. How many Bible verses have you memorized in your life?
2. Can you still quote them?

Action Steps

1. Write each verse on a sheet of paper or in a prayer journal.
2. Commit to memorize Psalm 22:4-5. "In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame." (ESV)

The Good Shepherd: My Leader

By Dr. Mark Smith

“The Good Shepherd knows where the good places are that will give us the rest we need.”

Saturday is yard day at my house during spring and summer months. I am too busy with my job during the week to get any of the yard work done so I have to wait until Saturday. I spend most of the day mowing and trimming the grass, using the blower to clear off the deck and sidewalks and picking weeds out of the garden and flower beds. Some weeks are worse than others but, at the end of the day, I always go into the house exhausted. I try each week to work smarter instead of harder. But things never change. I work so long and hard that when I'm finished, all I want to do is climb into the shower and crawl into my favorite chair. Needless to say, I do a poor job pacing myself with my yard work.

However, the Lord knows how to set the pace in our lives. As seen in the 23rd Psalm, the loving and caring Shepherd knew exactly how to make David slow down and give him the rest he needed. David starts by saying, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures...” (Psalm 23:2) However, when it comes to sheep, lying down is not as simple as you would think.

Philip Keller, in his book “A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23,” describes some little known, yet interesting, facts about sheep and the shepherds who take care of them. He writes, “Sheep do not lie



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*“He maketh me
to lie down in
green pastures: he
leadeth me beside
the still waters.”*

– Psalm 23:2

down easily, and will not unless four conditions are met. Because they are timid they will not lie down if they are afraid. Because they are social animals they will not lie down if there is friction among the sheep. If flies or parasites trouble them they will not lie down. Finally, if sheep are anxious about food or hungry they will not lie down. Rest comes because the shepherd has dealt with fear, friction, flies, and famine.”

Are we different than sheep? Rest, that kind of rest the Lord gives, only comes when we allow the Shepherd to deal with each problem in our lives. When we give Him our fears, His presence is there. When we have friction in our relationships, He is ready to bring reconciliation. When unforeseen problems occur, He will be with you. When we trust him with our basic needs, He will provide. Then, and only then, will we be able to lie down and find true rest. The Good Shepherd knows where the good places are that will give us the rest we need.

In the second part of Psalm 23:2, David describes God’s loving kindness on an even deeper level. He says, “...He leads me beside quiet waters.” (NIV) A good shepherd knows when his sheep need green pastures for rest and when they need fresh, clean water for refreshment. Like the shepherd, the Good Shepherd knows where to take us to the gentle water that will give us the provision we need. Notice that these are not rushing streams or stagnant pools but quiet, still, peaceful waters. When we put all our trust in the Good Shepherd and rest in Him, He will bring us to a place of peace and replenishment.

The imageries of Psalm 23:2 are rich with how God comforts, cares for and provides rest for His beloved sheep. You are His cherished sheep. He loves and cares for you that much. You can trust Him.

For Reflection

1. What is your greatest fear right now?
2. What relationships are you struggling with?
3. What problems are you dealing with?
4. What needs do you have that are not being met?

Action Steps

1. Write down your answers to the questions above.
2. Go to the Lord in prayer and ask Him, the Good Shepherd, for His help and provision. He is ready.
3. Take a few minutes to call the NCBAM HOPE LINE at 866-578-4673 (866-578-HOPE) and share with us your answers to the questions above.

Joy and Loneliness in the Life of Jesus

By Carol Layton

“From immense joy to intense loneliness, Jesus experienced the full range of human emotions.”

Have you ever felt like the joys of life are getting harder to find? Or that feelings of loneliness are more frequent? Jesus understands. From immense joy to intense loneliness, Jesus experienced the full range of human emotions.

The sources of a person's joy reveal something about their character. Let's consider the sources of Jesus' joy.

Friendships: When the Pharisees criticized Jesus' disciples for not fasting, he replied, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast, while the bridegroom is with them?" (Mark 2:19 NKJV) Jesus is so joyful in his friendships that he compares his disciples and himself to a wedding party.

Social Life: Jesus was clearly a people-person. He dined with Pharisees and publicans – impartially. He accepted invitations so often that critics accused him of being "a glutton, and a winebibber, a friend of... sinners." (Luke 7:34 NKJV)

Nature: Jesus spent much of his time outdoors. Consider his frequent references to the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, to sowers and reapers and vineyards. Consider the way he chose mountains, rivers, and lakes as backdrops for many sermons.



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"I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." – John 16:22

Serving Others: Jesus took joy in healing people, meeting their needs, and encouraging them.

Reading: Jesus frequently quoted and taught from the Tanakh (the Old Testament). He also read aloud at the synagogue in Nazareth.

Fellowship with the Father: Jesus prayed publicly but also “often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” (Luke 5:16 NIV)

In addition to experiencing joy, we know that Jesus also experienced loneliness. Even when he was healing and feeding the multitudes, the world was frequently hostile and scornful toward him. His disciples and close family members were often dull of understanding. He must have longed for a human friend who could truly understand His deepest struggles and experiences.

When Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples, he knew his loneliest and most difficult hours were near. He used the opportunity to teach them about unconquerable joy—the kind not dependent on man. “I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.” (John 16:22)

This joy is available to you today. May you have all the joy that comes from knowing him.

For Reflection

1. Consider the simple, natural sources of joy and pleasure in Jesus' life. Where do you find joy? What are some ways you can cultivate more joy in life?
2. Do you have a source of joy that the world cannot take away? If so, with whom will you share it?

Action Steps

1. Cultivate joy by deciding to be joyful in spite of any circumstances. Before your feet hit the floor in the morning, personalize Psalm 118:24 by singing or saying aloud, "This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it."
2. Joy increases and loneliness decreases through serving others. Bless someone through actions, encouragement, or prayer.

The Good Shepherd: My Refresher

By Dr. Mark Smith

“The Good Shepherd softly whispers to you and invites you to join Him on a path He calls, ‘the path of righteousness.’”

A few years ago, an angry man rushed through the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam until he reached Rembrandt’s famous painting “Nightwatch.” Then he took out a knife and slashed it repeatedly before he could be stopped. A short time later, a distraught, hostile man slipped into St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome with a hammer and began to smash Michelangelo’s beautiful sculpture The Pieta. Two cherished works of art were severely damaged. But what did officials do? Throw them out and forget about them? Absolutely not! Using the best experts, who worked with the utmost care and precision, they made every effort to restore the treasures.

Just like the officials in the story, God, the loving Good Shepherd, would never throw you out nor forget about you. You are His most treasured possession. He is relentless and will do whatever it takes to bring restoration to you.

In the Hebrew language the phrase “restores my soul” (Psalm 23:3) has a special meaning. It means to bring back, restore, refresh or repair. In his commentary, “The Treasury of David,” Charles Spurgeon helps us understand the heart of our Good Shepherd when he says, “The same hand which first rescued us from ruin, reclaims us from all our subsequent aberrations...He restores it to its



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“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

– Psalm 23:1-3

original purity, that was now grown foul and black with sin; for also, what good were it to have 'green' pastures and a black soul!... He restores it indeed to life, that has grown quite dead." But to receive this restoration requires something on our parts.

Notice the steps that precede the restoration in verses 1 and 2. The Good Shepherd calls us to trust Him, rest in Him and surrender everything to Him. Surrendering everything requires handing Him our fears, relationship problems, life situations and our daily needs. When we give Him our fears, His presence is there. When we have friction in our relationships, He is ready to bring reconciliation. When unforeseen problems occur, He will be with you. When we worry about our basic needs, He is capable of providing. By surrendering, we will be able to lie down and find true rest. Then He can and will restore us: bring us back, refresh us, repair us. Are you willing to let Him?

After the Good Shepherd has restored you, because of who He is, He desires to lead you. He does not yell at you or force something on you. Rather, the Good Shepherd softly whispers to you and invites you to join Him on a path He calls, "the path of righteousness." (Psalm 23:3) This is not any random pathway but an entrance into His rest. It is a path He leads you down as He moves away the debris of your brokenness. It is a path He walks in front on and helps you step over the fallen limbs of your struggles. This is the path He holds your hand on as He guides you around the boulders of your heartache. As we walk along this path with the Good Shepherd, we will be strengthened not only to walk, but to run.

For Reflection

1. Let's go back to an earlier question in the devotion. Are you willing to let Him restore you? To restore your soul?
2. What will you have to surrender to the Good Shepherd to find His path of righteousness and the rest that He offers you?

Action Step

1. Today or before the end of the week, go for a walk. This could be in your neighborhood, a local shopping center or mall, in the woods, etc. Pray as you walk. Ask the Lord, the Good Shepherd, for His help in restoring you. He is ready.

The God Who Whispers

By Dr. Lee Childs

**“It was through that quiet voice the Lord told
Elijah he was not alone.”**

As a prophet of God, Elijah communicated the word of God. God’s words declared by Elijah were primarily directed at the evil acts of King Ahab who ruled the Northern Kingdom. Ahab had led Israel to violate the First Commandment from God by instituting the regular practice of worshipping Baal, the false god of Ahab’s wife, Jezebel. To urge Ahab and Israel to repent and return to God, Elijah, at God’s command, declared a drought on the land that lasted some three and a half years (1 Kings 17:1).

Just before God ended the drought and to demonstrate to Israel and Ahab that God is the only true God, Elijah calls all the people of Israel to Mount Carmel including Ahab and the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah. It is here that God miraculously consumed with fire from heaven the sacrifice Elijah had prepared including the offering, the wood, the stones, the dust and the gallons of water drenched on the altar. This was after the prophets of the false gods failed to call their god to consume their sacrifice (1 Kings 18:20). The conclusion of the people was “Yahweh, He is God!”.

This did not sit well with Jezebel. In addition to the clear declaration of the falsehood of her religion and the truthfulness that Yahweh is the only true God, Elijah, as part of God’s judgement, killed Jezebel’s 850 prophets. Jezebel’s response was to notify Elijah that



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*“And after the
earthquake a fire;
but the Lord was
not in the fire:
and after the
fire a still small
voice.” – 1 Kings
19:12*

she was after him to do the same to him that he had done to her prophets.

Now we would like to think that this great man of God would trust in the provision and protection of God. After all, the true God who could consume a sacrifice with fire from heaven would surely intercede for him. But that is not the response of Elijah.

Elijah became afraid and immediately ran for his life into the wilderness. Elijah felt alone. He had a death wish and fell asleep. These are all the classic signs of what we would diagnose as depression today (1 Kings 19:3-5). At the core of Elijah's state was he felt abandoned by God and the Israelites to whom God had sent him to minister.

Was Elijah correct in his feelings? Was he alone? Had God abandoned him? Was he the only worshiper of Yahweh left in all of Israel?

We find that God had not abandoned him. This was an opportunity for Elijah to experience solitude with the Lord. The angel of the Lord provided shade, food, drink, direction and purpose while he was on his wilderness journey (1 Kings 19:4-8). He also provided something that is most significant for us when we are feeling alone and abandoned. The angel of the Lord touched Elijah (1 Kings 19:5,7). What greater way can we know the Lord cares for us than His promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5) and what great assurance can we, as Christ Followers, have today than to know the presence of the Lord is abiding in us through the person of the Holy Spirit.

Another way the Lord reassured Elijah that his feelings needed checking was He spoke to Elijah. It was not uncommon for God to share with Elijah the prophetic words to declare to others as Elijah carried out his mission. This is slightly different. These words God shared were directed at and to Elijah. After displaying a mighty wind, an earthquake and a fire that did not reveal to Elijah anything about God, there came a voice, a soft whisper. It was through that quiet voice the Lord told Elijah he was not alone and that there were 7,000 who had not bowed to the false gods. In that quiet voice God reminded Elijah of his purpose and instructed him to return to his call of serving as a prophet (1 Kings 19:9-18).

For Reflection

1. Are you feeling alone today?
2. Do you feel the Lord may have abandoned you?

Action Steps

1. Compare the ways the Lord provided for Elijah and how He has provided for you. What are some differences? Some similarities?
2. Go to the Lord and ask Him to provide for you. Write your requests below or in a prayer journal.
3. Go to the Lord and thank Him for the ways He has provided for you. Write them below or in a prayer journal.

The Good Shepherd: My Comfort

By Dr. Mark Smith

“Psalm 23 serves as the bridge between affliction and triumph. Both for Jesus, and for us.”

Walking down a dimly lit street or into a dark room can be unnerving. It doesn't matter if you're familiar with your surroundings or not; it can make you feel insecure and sometimes afraid. King David understood these feelings quite well. His life was full of difficult situations and darkness. Whether in the pasture with his sheep, on the battlefield fighting an enemy or in the palace ruling his kingdom, David often found himself walking through dark valleys.

It is interesting to notice where David's beloved statement, “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me,” is located in God's Word. It is strategically placed between Psalm 22 and Psalm 24. Jonathan Parnell, lead pastor of Cities Church in Minneapolis, MN, unfolds the drama and helps us understand the connection between these 3 chapters. He writes:

“In an unparalleled way, Psalm 22 captures the suffering of the Messiah in the first person. David's voice says, “Why have you forsaken me?” and, “I am a worm and not a man,” and, “I am poured out like water.” We step inside the mind of the afflicted man — of Jesus — to feel his pain and see his faith. Faith is an amazing theme here. The afflicted one is forsaken. But as we began to see, he's not ultimately forsaken.”



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“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

– Psalm 23:4

As we read in Psalm 22, the sound of affliction turns to foreshadowing deliverance. Even in the thick of his pain and restlessness, the afflicted one knows that God can be trusted. He knows that God is faithful (Psalm 22:2–5). Then suddenly there’s a twist: The entire world is going to worship the Lord one day! Just like that. “For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations” (Psalm 22:27–28).

Jump to Psalm 24 where the theme of kingship gets even clearer. It comes at the high point when the king takes His place on the throne. That’s what is behind the epic chorus of “Who is this King of glory?” It is a coronation song. The righteous king of Psalm 24:4 (like the righteous man of Psalm 1:1–3 and Psalm 15:2–3) ascends to the Lord’s hill (like the hill in Psalm 2:6 and Psalm 15:1).

The king has triumphed, and he proceeds to the seat from where he will rule the nations, until every last one of his enemies become his footstool (Psalm 110:1–2).

So we see affliction and a glimmer of hope in Psalm 22. We celebrate a victorious monarchy in Psalm 24. And Psalm 23 comes right in the middle. So what’s its role?

Psalm 23 serves as the bridge between affliction and triumph. Both for Jesus, and for us. The pain of the afflicted one in Psalm 22 is translated into contentment and trust in Psalm 23. There is pain, real pain. Darkness surrounds this suffering one. Insults are blasted. The mouth of the lion opens wide. The wild ox readies its head for a jab. But God is the rescuer. God is the shepherd. He leads and restores. Even though the afflicted one walks through the valley of the shadow of death, God is there to guide and rescue and comfort (Psalm 23:4).

For Reflection

1. Do you feel that Psalm 22:1 is happening in your life right now?
2. Have you, like David, like Jesus, asked the question, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Action Steps

1. Before you go to bed tonight, make a list of all the areas where you feel God has forsaken you.
2. Beside each item on your list write the words of Psalm 23:4: "I will fear no evil; For You are with me."

Devotion from a Dungeon: Dealing with Loneliness & Discouragement

By Dr. Currie Tilley

“The Christian life is not meant to be lived independently or in isolation from others.

Over and over again in Scripture we find encouragement to connect with one another in community: to love, pray for, and forgive one another.”

The apostle Paul is one of the giants of the Christian faith. God used this man in great ways to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to start new churches and to write a large part of what we know as the New Testament. In 2 Timothy 4:9-18, Paul is nearing the end of his ministry and his life (v6-7). He is in a cold, dark dungeon and is writing his last correspondence to Timothy, his son in the faith, because he wants to encourage Timothy to persevere in the face of difficulty that is sure to come (see 2 Timothy 3 :1 and 4:3-4). This passage is a very personal glimpse into his heart and life.

What can we learn from Paul’s attitude and actions during this time of loneliness and discouragement?

Acknowledge Your Loneliness. Be Honest!

Loneliness and difficulties are a reality in life. We try to put on a good front and not let anyone know what is really going on inside. We often feel like we are alone: sometimes physically, sometimes emotionally, sometimes spiritually. Paul is probably feeling alone



“And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”
– 2 Timothy 4:18

in all three ways at this point. You have likely experienced this feeling yourself. You may be feeling it right now. You might wonder: Where is everyone? Doesn't anyone understand, doesn't anyone care? God knows our hearts and what is going on, so we can be honest with Him.

Ask For Help.

Let others know about your struggles and concerns so that they can pray for you and encourage you. Paul had a need and he did not hesitate to ask Timothy to "make every effort to come to me soon." By the way, this was no small request. We often think of this in our context where we ask one of our family members or friends who live close by to come over for a visit. This journey for Timothy would likely have taken three to four months!

The Christian life is not meant to be lived independently or in isolation from others. Over and over again in Scripture we find encouragement to connect with one another in community: to love, pray for, and forgive one another.

Accept God's Provisions.

The cloak (v13) represents physical provision. It would provide protection against the cold damp of the dungeon. When is the last time you focused on thanking God for the basic necessities of life? Clothing, shelter, and food are all God's provisions for our basic needs.

The books and parchments represent spiritual provision. This is an encouragement to us to value God's Word. God has made a tremendous provision to us that has no equal. Nothing can replace the need we have for God's Word in our lives. There is no substitute! When we are confronted with loneliness and difficulty, we can turn to God's Word for comfort and strength. We are never alone. He is always with us.

Avoid Staying Focused on the Negative.

Paul acknowledged the disappointments but did not dwell there. Paul acknowledges the loneliness in his life, but notice his response. He does not stay focused on the negative and blame everyone else for his circumstances. Paul gives a very Christ-like response to the situation! "May it not be laid to their charge." (v16) Paul is extending the grace to

others that has first been shown to him. Aren't you glad that God has extended grace to you?

Abide in Christ.

Rejoice in your relationship with Jesus and focus on the hope you have in Him. Ultimate comfort and peace only come from the Lord. Other things may be helpful for a while, but only the Lord can offer that which truly lasts. The Lord stood beside Paul to provide the strength he needed. Paul responded with an exclamation of praise: to Him "be glory forever and ever. Amen!" (v18)

For Reflection

1. What are ways that the Lord has extended grace to you?
2. What are ways that you have extended grace to others?

Action Steps

1. Look through Bibles you may have in your home: perhaps those having once belonged to others. Note any highlighted verses or margin notes. What do you imagine the Lord was speaking to the person who marked the verse?

Nurtured in the Presence of Enemies

By Carol Layton

“The Lord delights to set tables for us: to provide, nurture, sustain, and lead us beside quiet waters.”

When my husband and I were young and inexperienced, we kept driving a car with squealing brakes until one Sunday on the way home from church, they suddenly stopped squealing—and working. But God, in His mercy, had prepared the perfect place for our misadventure. We were able to coast into the empty gravel parking lot of a Mom and Pop restaurant before coming to a nonchalant stop.

Being young and inexperienced, we assumed that since the restaurant was closed, we would figure something out on Monday morning. But by then, the restaurant had already had our lime green 1973 Mercury station wagon towed far away. We were angry—mostly at ourselves, but also at the restaurant.

The next day, a friend invited me to be her guest at an upcoming “Women’s Aglow” luncheon to be held at this same restaurant. As I sat down to enjoy the meal, I thought of how just days before I had been angry at this impatient and heartless restaurant and now I was being served there. The verse about the good shepherd setting a table in the presence of enemies came to mind. I knew better than to think of the restaurant as my enemy. But as I was being



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*“Thou preparest
a table before me
in the presence of
mine enemies.”*

– Psalm 23:5

served, I considered the verse a sweet reminder that Jesus cared for me in spite of the actions of others, and most astonishing of all—in spite of my own mistakes.

Setting a table is such a lovely metaphor, isn't it? It's the epitome of hospitality and provision: requiring only that you sit and enjoy yourself. The Lord delights to set tables for us: to provide, nurture, sustain, and lead us beside quiet waters—as often as we are inclined to be led.

And about those enemies. Sometimes, they are us. Our own flesh, our own mistakes. But the Good Shepherd sets a gracious table anyway, confronting our enemies, within or without, with proof of His unconditional love.

For Reflection

1. What are ways the Lord has set tables for you?
2. How can you demonstrate that you trust the Lord to deal with your enemies?

Action Steps

1. Focus your attention on a provision that the Lord has set before you. Commune with the Good Shepherd about this blessing.
2. If you have been an enemy to yourself (critical or unforgiving), forgive and befriend yourself.

God Is Faithful

By Dr. Ashley Allen

“God is faithful. He is true to what He says He will do and He will do as He promises.”

I remember one summer I had to fly to New York City for meetings. New York is one of my favorite cities, but a dear friend who had been a missionary in the city for many years had recently moved. Because of my friend's departure it would be the first time I would be in the city by myself enjoying bright lights, skyscrapers and fun attractions. Navigating the streets of the city is not a dreaded task for me; I rather enjoy it. However, after several hours I realized I was alone in the middle of millions of people walking beside some of the most famous sites in the world! I needed someone to talk with and there was no one around. I was lonely in a crowd of people.

Psalms 86 is one of my favorite psalms. In this chapter, the reader sees the raw transparency of King David before the Lord God. David was the King of Israel and had servants at his beck and call, but he describes himself as “afflicted and needy” (v1). David asks the Lord not only to listen to him, but to also answer him. David needed someone to talk with and listen to him.

David is in a lonely and needy state as he cries to the Lord “daily” (v3). However, it is in this state that David does one key thing: he recounts who God is. It is within the recounting of the character of God that David realizes where hope lay.



DAY 18

*“Give ear, O Lord,
unto my prayer;
and attend to
the voice of my
supplications. In
the day of my
trouble I will call
upon thee: for
thou wilt answer
me. Among the
gods there is none
like unto thee, O
Lord; neither are
there any works
like unto thy
works.” – Psalm
86:6-8*

David remembers God is good, ready to forgive, and abundant in loving kindness to all who call upon Him (v5). When we are in circumstances such as David's, it is easy to forget God's goodness. However, it is David himself who recounts to the Lord in prayer that God is lavish in His kindness and faithfulness. God is faithful. He is true to what He says He will do and He will do as He promises.

David continues in his prayer telling the Lord that in his day of trouble he will call upon the Lord because he knows God will answer him (v7). David does not ask the Lord if He will answer him; instead he says to the Lord, "You will answer me." This is a big difference! David has assurance and trust that God sees and cares for him. He had already asked the Lord to "give ear...unto [his] prayer" and "attend to the voice of [his] supplications!" (v6). David knew the Lord was listening to him as he prayed and communicated with God. God heard David as he cried out.

One of the requests David made of God as he prayed was that God would teach David His ways so that David would walk in God's truth (v11). David had a desire to learn from God. He did not believe he was too old to learn anything new from the Lord. But, David didn't just want to learn from God; he wanted to live according to God's Word. David, in the afflicted and needy place he found himself, wanted to live as God desired. Part of walking in God's truth (v11) included trusting God when he felt alone and needy. He had to trust God for His presence and His faithfulness.

Just as David confidently trusted God in the middle of his circumstances, God does not change. He promises that He is the same yesterday, today and forever. And, He is faithful to His promise.

For Reflection

1. How can you trust God today?
2. Knowing He hears you, what can you bring to the Lord in prayer?

Action Steps

1. Write down aspects of God's character, such as love, faithfulness, etc. How do you see these aspects in your life today?
2. Spend time in prayer with the Lord. He is there in all of your circumstances.

Jesus Understands Your Loneliness

By Dr. Mark Smith

“Jesus knows exactly what it means to be alone—totally alone. Therefore, you can come to Him because He understands what you’re going through and how you feel.”

The day Jesus was hanging on the cross became the day that changed everything for all of humanity. So much happened during the six hours He was suspended between heaven and earth but one thing is certain, Jesus experienced complete and utter loneliness. God the Father had turned His back on His beloved Son.

During those moments of abandonment every verse of every passage of every book of the Old Testament must have been running through His mind. Jesus must have been clinging to every syllable of God’s Word to bring peace and comfort during His torture. Matthew brings to light one of the few statements Jesus made from the cross when He cried out in horror, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46) When Jesus spoke these few words, He was uttering the same words King David had recorded in Psalm 22.

We can easily imagine there were many circumstances in the life of King David where he experienced the feelings of separation from God when he was running from his enemies. There is little doubt that David found himself in many seemingly impossible situations and wondered where God was and why He was not there to rescue



DAY
19

“From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’) – Matthew 27:45-46 NIV

him. However, as Jesus intentionally quoted this verse it shows the most intense emotions He experienced on the cross.

In his Commentary on Psalm 22, David Guzik wrote: "Jesus had known great pain and suffering (both physical and emotional) during His life. Yet He had never known separation or alienation from God His Father." At this moment, Jesus was experiencing what He had never experienced before. He was completely alone.

On the cross, a heavenly transaction took place. God the Father regarded His only begotten Son as if He were a sinner. As Paul would later write, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV) Jesus not only endured the withdrawal of the Father's fellowship, but also the actual outpouring of the Father's wrath upon Him as a substitute for sinful humanity. Charles Spurgeon referred to this time as the "blackness and darkness of his horror," the time where Jesus "penetrated the depths of the caverns of suffering."

Spurgeon also stated that it was necessary that Jesus feel this loss: "for the condemned in hell must have tasted of that bitterness; and therefore the Father closed the eye of his love, put the hand of justice before the smile of His face, and left His Son to cry, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'"

Can you relate to Jesus' cry of "Why"? Have you asked God this same question? We can imagine the answer to Jesus' question: Why? "Because My Son, You have chosen to stand in the place of guilty sinners. You, who have never known sin, have made the infinite sacrifice to become sin and receive My just wrath upon sin and sinners. You do this because of Your great love, and because of My great love."

Jesus knows exactly what it means to be alone, totally alone... therefore, you can come to Him because He understands what you're going through and exactly how you feel.

For Reflection

1. On the cross, what did Jesus do in the moment God turned away from Him?
2. Prior to Jesus going to the cross, Peter and Judas had both forsaken Jesus. Why was Jesus more distraught when God turned His back on Him?

Action Step

1. This action is a "Random Act of Kindness" challenge. Before the end of the week, go to a local coffee shop. Give the cashier a \$5 bill and say, "Please treat the next customer who places an order for less than five dollars." (Allow the cashier to keep the change.)

The Voice of the Shepherd

By Tiffany Capps

“A shepherd is not just merely seen by his sheep, but rather he makes himself available to be known by them.”

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” Such beautiful and comforting words found in Psalm 23:6. A life full of goodness and mercy, followed by dwelling in the Lord’s house forever?! Yes! Please!!

It is a comfort to know that we can have these tremendous blessings, but yet it is substantially comforting to know why these blessings are available to us.

As David writes the twenty-third Psalm, it’s important to note that he first declares that the Lord is his Shepherd! If anyone was familiar with the role of a shepherd it was David! The fact that he knew he would never find himself in “want” for anything is powerful. Why could he make this bold proclamation? David knew his Good Shepherd was always faithful, always present and provided for every need he could possibly have.

Now here is where it gets really comforting! As we learn and come to understand that all of the Old Testament points to the coming of Jesus, we can then see how Jesus has fulfilled all that was written in the New Testament. In John 10, Jesus declares Himself to be our Good Shepherd. How perfectly He has fulfilled this role and its attributes! This Good



DAY
20

*“Surely goodness
and mercy shall
follow me all the
days of my life:
and I will dwell
in the house of the
Lord for ever.”
– Psalm 23:6*

Shepherd, Jesus, laid down His life for His sheep, He stays near His sheep in order to guide and protect them, and He constantly talks to them so that the sheep know Him and His voice.

When times of difficulty and loneliness arise, our Good Shepherd will not scatter and abandon us. Instead, He draws near to us, remaining to be our constant comforter and defender. His voice will be the one that we hear in the darkness of the night: speaking words of peace and comfort. When He speaks, the sound of His voice will be known to us because we know our Shepherd and we are known by Him! Knowing that Jesus is the Good Shepherd means we can know that we are never left alone and we have His voice of truth.

On countless occasions, I have gone to God's word and received timely truth. I have uttered prayers of "Oh, God please work! Please help me!" and I have seen Him lovingly intervene and answer my pleas in ways beyond what I could have imagined.

Walking and living out our lives with our Good Shepherd means walking in His goodness and His mercy even in difficult times. Having His goodness and mercy following us all the days of our lives means abiding in Him, His word and talking to Him constantly through prayer! When we seek Him through these means, His goodness and mercy is found!

Do you know this Good Shepherd? Are you seeking to know Him and His truth daily? If not, I urge you to seek after Him! He openly invites us to do so, and when we do, He promises that we will find Him! This Good Shepherd longs to make Himself known to you today!

For Reflection

1. Read John 10:1-18. How does Jesus' description of Himself as our Good Shepherd help you have confidence that His goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life?

Action Steps

1. List the attributes of a shepherd from John 10:1-18.
2. Read the same passage and substitute your name for "sheep."

Blessed Assurance

By Jim Edminson

**“Jesus knew what it was like to be alone—
even in a crowd.”**

There are few realities as traumatic as feeling completely alone. It can be horrifying—feeling that you cannot reach out and no one can reach in—isolated, trapped, like you are in a box with the lid closed over your head. How well Daniel knew those very feelings. He faced a devastating reality.

The biblical hero, Daniel, was more than 80 years old when he was placed in the lions’ den. He had been faithful to God. People knew him as a person of character. He was a good guy, and yet as an older person, perhaps even frail, he was cast alone into a most perilous situation. All those around him felt his fate was sealed. Fear could easily have gripped Daniel. Anxiety could easily have washed over him. The danger he faced was real.

There are many perilous situations that we face in this life. The world we have built, the life we have cultivated over many years, can change drastically. The loss of a loved one, a close friend, the diagnosis of an illness, or financial woes can make us feel that our world is crashing down around us. We can feel trapped: out of control and alone.

But scripture tells us that God is with us. The morning after Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den, his captors were amazed to find him untouched by the lions. Daniel professed, “My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths.” (Daniel



DAY
21

*“Let your
conversation
be without
covetousness; and
be content with
such things as ye
have: for he hath
said, I will never
leave thee, nor
forsake thee.”
– Hebrews 13:5*

6:22). Daniel had not been alone, and God was glorified by all who witnessed his saga.

The writer of Hebrews reminded the early Jews who followed Jesus that God was faithful, recalling to their minds His promise in Deuteronomy: “He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” (31:6). This was the assurance they needed as they were isolated and viewed with skepticism for their new faith. The person Jesus, who they now followed, was a Jewish heretic. Family members and friends turned their backs and closed doors that previously had been open. In many ways, they were alone.

Jesus understood what His followers would face. He knew what it was like to be alone — even in a crowd. He understood facing fears. Jesus said, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33). He is the lifeline to all those who call upon Him. He is our hope. In His final words spoken on this earth, He offered assurance that He would be with His believers always, “even to the very end of the world” (Matthew 28:20).

None of us desire to feel the pangs of loneliness. But it is at these times that the promises of the Living Word can comfort us. Just as it was with Daniel, even as it was with the first New Testament believers, the Spirit of the almighty God is with us to deliver us. We can stand, even alone, victoriously in this assurance!

For Reflection

1. Can you open your heart and mind to accepting God’s presence with you as truth regardless of your feelings?

Action Step

1. Begin to thank God (aloud) for being with you and for His promise to never leave you.

God Connects When We Feel Disconnected

By Terri Howell

“God is sovereign and controls everything. Although He gave Satan permission to afflict Job, He was still in control. Each time He allowed Satan to afflict Job, He also provided a boundary.”

I will never forget the day my grandmother's car was sold. We stood in silence as the new owner drove away from the assisted living facility with the last vestige of her independence. She had already lost her husband (my grandfather) and her home. Now her car pulled out of sight.

Oftentimes, we think of suffering as an event. Something devastating happens. We lean into God, our family members and loved ones, and manage to come through the event.

But what happens when a series of events occur like we see in the life of Job? When dealing with multiple events, as each new one arises, previous losses can bubble to the surface and seem like an emotional avalanche. Like Job, we may feel isolated in our sufferings.

After the loss of his ten children, the story of Job continues:

“Very well,” the LORD told Satan, “he is in your power; only spare his life.” So Satan left the Lord's presence and infected Job with terrible boils from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job



“I had heard reports about you, but now my eyes have seen you.”
– Job 42:5 CSB

took a piece of broken pottery to scrape himself while he sat among the ashes. His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" "You speak as a foolish woman speaks," he told her. "Should we accept only good from God and not adversity?" Throughout all this Job did not sin in what he said." (Job 2:6-10 CSB)

We can only imagine how Job felt when his wife and sole remaining family member suggested that he curse God and die. On top of that, his so-called friends added insult to injury by blaming the victim, Job, whose sin must have caused these tragedies. Job begins to question not only the purpose of his life but even why he was born.

"Why was I not stillborn; why didn't I die as I came from the womb?" (Job 3:11 CSB)

Like Job, we don't understand God's purposes in many seasons of our lives, but we can read his story and learn a lot. When Job was completely isolated, God was there.

First, Job's friends had thin theology. They were correct in blaming brokenness on sin, because all brokenness originated in the Garden of Eden. But theirs was a legalistic theology of sin that rewards good behavior and punishes bad. Suffering is not equally given according to how good or bad a person may be. True theology without understanding context is not only inappropriate but can be damaging.

Second, God is sovereign and controls everything. Although He gave Satan permission to afflict Job, He was still in control. Each time He allowed Satan to afflict Job, He also provided a boundary.

Finally, we are never alone in our suffering. When life's trials become intense, focus on God who promised: "I will never leave you or abandon you." (Heb. 13:5 CSB)

We marvel at the "patience of Job" after 39 chapters of intense suffering and painful discourse. We breathe a sigh of relief when God restores Job's family and possessions.

But what most people miss is the picture of Christ in Job. Job's friends

thought he was being punished by God for his sin. Even though God called Job a “righteous” man, he was a human being with a sin nature. But in Isaiah 53, Jesus is called “a man of suffering,” “despised and rejected,” “struck down by God,” but for our rebellion and iniquities.

Job and his friends engaged in lengthy dialogue about who they thought God was, but the story concludes with God telling Job who He actually is. Job responds, “I had heard reports about you, but now my eyes have seen you.” (Job 42:5 CSB)

For Reflection

1. What are some memorable trials God has allowed in your life?
2. At what point(s) in your life have you felt alone in suffering?
3. Can you think of ways God may use suffering to reveal Himself and His love for you?

Action Steps

1. Pray and thank God for His presence even when you feel alone.
2. Ask God to show you how to comfort others who are suffering.

Light and Momentary Troubles

By Dr. Mark Smith

“Even if one were to live for a hundred years and suffer every day, by the measure of eternity it is but for a moment.”

When Paul writes the words “our light and momentary troubles” (NIV) we might wonder if he ever knew any “real” trials. Some might think, “Well Paul, your affliction might be light, but mine isn’t. If you only knew how I am suffering! Why, it’s unbearable!” Paul didn’t write as a kindergartner in the school of suffering: he had an advanced graduate degree. He described some of his suffering with these terms in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28:

- Stripes
- Prisons
- Beaten
- Stoned
- Shipwrecked
- Perils of waters
- Robbers
- In perils of my own countrymen
- In perils of the Gentiles
- In perils in the city
- In perils in the wilderness
- In perils in the sea
- In perils among false brethren



DAY
23

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

– 2 Corinthians 4:17 NIV

- In weariness and toil
- In sleeplessness often
- In hunger and thirst
- In fastings often
- In cold and nakedness

Those were just the physical, outward sufferings. So when Paul writes “our light and momentary troubles”, we can know God means our light affliction too. If Paul could say his affliction was light, then what is ours?

Perhaps you’re asking, “Why is our affliction light and not heavy?” Because even the worst of it, by the measure of eternity, is but for a moment. This is partially true in the sense that most of our troubles come and go, and “this too shall pass.” It is also true in the sense that even a long life by this world’s standard is nothing on the scale of eternity. Even if one were to live for a hundred years and suffer every day, by the measure of eternity it is but for a moment.

Another way of looking at Paul’s statement is to consider what God accomplishes in us through our affliction: “Achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” and “If indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” (Romans 8:17 NIV)

Glory is tied to suffering, and God will accomplish in us a glory far heavier than any affliction we have suffered here. Affliction is not something to be endured in order to reach glory. It is the very process which creates the glory. Through travail comes birth.

It is as if Paul says, “Go ahead and get out the scale. Put all your afflictions on one side of the scale, and even put your thumb down on that side. Then let me place the weight of glory on the other side of the scale, and you will see what a light affliction you really have.” When seen

in the grand scheme of things, yes, our affliction is light! Our afflictions are light compared to:

- What others suffer
- What we deserve
- What Jesus suffered for us
- The blessings we enjoy
- The sustaining power of God's grace

Understanding this, we can say with Paul, "our light and momentary troubles." Paul isn't saying that all afflictions automatically produce glory. It is possible to allow suffering to destroy us and to let affliction make us bitter, miserable, and self-focused. However, if we will look to the things which are not seen, then our affliction will work in us an eternal weight of glory.

For Reflection

1. In light of all eternity, why is our affliction light and not heavy?

Action Steps

1. Meet with your pastor or the pastor of a church near your home. Talk to them about why you feel lonely.
2. Call the NCBAM Hope Line at 866-578-4673 (866-578-HOPE) and talk to someone about your lonely feelings.

Life-Changing Words

By Rev. Ron Freeman

“Health experts tell us that positive reinforcement is something that everyone needs. It is a productive tool that brings out the best in people.”

Has God ever called you to a total about-face in your life? In Acts Chapter 9, we find one of these events. Saul was a person zealous in his hatred toward the followers of Jesus. He was on a mission to Damascus to persecute the followers of Christ. He was a feared man and rightly so; however, on that journey something happened in Saul's life that could cripple most people if not properly handled.

Health experts tell us that positive reinforcement is something that everyone needs. It is a productive tool that brings out the best in people. When one is only told the bad things about themselves, they never reach their full potential. Let's look at the following events in Saul's life: on the road to Damascus, in his encounter with Ananias, and on his spiritual journey.

In Acts 9:3, Saul and his traveling party were stopped in their tracks by a blinding light (from heaven). A voice said: "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?" Saul's answer was, "Who are you Lord?" The voice answered, "I Am Jesus whom you are persecuting." (NIV)

Look at the personality of Saul because it shows us some distinctive qualities. He is arrogant: he knows that he is good at what he does. Then, look



DAY
24

“Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.”
– Acts 9:22 NIV

at him after this encounter on the Damascus Road. This self-sufficient strongman, now blinded by the light, has to be led by his travel companions to Damascus.

In darkness, he waited three days for an answer. Can you put yourself in his place? Is fear present? How about loneliness and uncertainty? Then, Saul comes face to face with Ananias, God's spokesman. Saul, in this darkened encounter, saw a vision of what was going to happen, but he had no idea how profound it was going to be. Here is when his about-face moment takes place.

Saul experiences a supernatural event that changes his life forever. In Acts 9:16 we read: "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." (NIV) Everyone was skeptical of Saul. Many wanted to kill him. Even the disciples were afraid to befriend or believe him.

God knew what was going to happen to Saul. He had equipped Saul with a strong personality that would help him overcome many obstacles. However, many of us do not have that so how do we handle the negative things said about us? We learn just like Saul did that the proof is in Jesus (Acts 9:22) and the power is in Jesus.

Saul who became the Apostle Paul experienced times of pain, loneliness and sorrow but he learned the proof of it all is found in one place, Jesus. The deciding factor is found in Acts 9:6 (NIV): "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." God really does have something life-changing to say, so just listen!

For Reflection

1. How do you handle negative things said to or about you?
2. Do you retaliate with negative words of your own?

Action Step

1. When you go to the store this week, be intentional with your words. Make a point to compliment or encourage other shoppers or employees. For example, "Your children are very well behaved" or "You make this store a pleasant place to shop."

Ruth's Strategies

By Rev. Robert Leonard

“We can choose to be strong in our faith in Jesus Christ and move forward to the next step in our journey.”

The story of Ruth's life is one of highs, lows, and back to highs. It might be said that her life was a “roller coaster” emotional journey.

Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, along with their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, moved from Bethlehem to Moab to escape the famine in Judah. Elimelech died, leaving Naomi and her sons without a family leader; soon Mahlon and Kilion married two women from Moab: Ruth and Orpah (This was in violation of God's law.) After about 10 years, both of Naomi's sons died, leaving Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth as widows.

Later, the news arrived that the famine in Bethlehem was over. Naomi made plans to return to her homeland and family. She told Ruth and Orpah to return to their families and start new lives. Orpah decided to do so, but Ruth insisted that she was going with Naomi and soon they journeyed back to Bethlehem. Arriving in Bethlehem, Naomi was recognized by the people of the town. They began to know Ruth as the two settled into the town.

To provide for Naomi and herself, Ruth began to glean the local barley fields: fields that belonged to Boaz, who was a part of Elimelech's family. Boaz gave special privileges (grace) to Ruth, and they began to build a relationship that led to marriage and the birth of their son, Obed.



DAY
25

*“And Ruth said,
Intreat me not
to leave thee, or
to return from
following after
thee: for whither
thou goest, I will
go; and where
thou lodgest, I
will lodge: thy
people shall be
my people, and
thy God my God:
Where thou diest,
will I die, and
there will I be
buried: the Lord
do so to me, and
more also, if ought
but death part
thee and me.”
– Ruth 1:16-17*

Here is a summary of Ruth's "roller coaster" life:

A high time in Ruth's life must have been when she married one of Naomi's sons. We can imagine her hopeful for her future.

A low time came when her husband died. She must have experienced loneliness and sadness, but because of her strong relationship with Naomi, she decided to follow her.

A high time returned when she met Boaz, married and had a son.

What was God up to in Ruth's life? Ruth could have left Naomi, who was also grieving. Ruth could have isolated herself and become lonely in a strange new town. Instead, she chose to maintain a relationship with Naomi. She chose to stay active in life, which eventually led to a new life of hope in her marriage to Boaz. She chose to follow the God of Naomi, who used her in His plan to bring the Redeemer, Jesus Christ into the world.

During low times in life, we can feel tempted to isolate ourselves. What can we do to overcome these feelings? We can follow Ruth's strategies: we can choose to maintain strong relationships, to maintain our community of support, to stay active, to be strong in our faith in Jesus Christ, and to move forward into the next steps of our journey.

For Reflection

1. What were some high times in your life? Some low times?
2. What can you do to overcome the low times in your life?

Action Steps

1. Like Ruth, take the following steps: maintain strong relationships and a community of support, stay active, stay strong in your faith.
2. Call a friend from church or a family member and share Ruth's strategies with him or her.

Home Alone: The Story of Naomi

By Rev. Martha McDowell

“He alone understands what you have been through and loves you too much to let you carry your pain alone. He stands ready in ways we can’t imagine to show his perfect care for us.”

Are you home alone in this season of your life? Are you grieving this? Are other happenings causing you distress? Emotions like anger, depression, and denial can often hide feelings of grief. Take a fresh look at your emotions. Could you be grieving?

Few biblical characters experienced grief like Naomi. In Ruth 1:1-7 we read that she lived through famine that forced her to leave her homeland. She lived through the death of her husband and the loss of both of her sons. She experienced financial insecurity as she aged. Have you experienced grief over any of these things?

Grief can make us feel isolated, even when surrounded by others. Being alone and loneliness are not the same. Naomi experienced loneliness even when both daughters-in-law were with her. She encouraged both of them to go back to their mothers, but Ruth refused and traveled back to Naomi’s homeland with her.

When Naomi arrived back in Bethlehem (Ruth 1:19-22) and saw women she knew, she still felt alone. Her grief made her feel helpless and without hope. Naomi felt the Lord had forsaken her. Our grief can make us feel this same hopelessness. Grief contains emotions we must allow ourselves to feel



DAY
26

*“The women said to Naomi:
‘Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.’”*

– Ruth 4:14-15

in order to work through grief in a healthy way. However, one does not want to get stuck in the stages of the grief process. Naomi's story gives us some insight into how we can accomplish healthy grieving.

How did Naomi change from "bitter" in chapter 1 to "restored" in chapter 4? (Ruth 4:14-17) Understanding this will help us in our grief. First, she took her grief and headed home. Have you taken your grief home to Christ? He alone understands what you have been through and loves you too much to let you carry your pain alone. He stands ready in ways we can't imagine to show his perfect care for us.

Second, feelings are important but they can lie. Naomi's feelings told her to despair. God's word can be trusted when our feelings lock us into our loneliness and tell us our situation is hopeless. Hebrews 13:5 assures us: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Be reminded of God's eternal truth when your feelings tell you otherwise. Inventory your feelings often and if they are in opposition to the word of God, trust in God's truth and not your feelings.

Lastly, God will provide those to walk with us on the difficult journeys, but we have to allow them into our lives as we grieve. Ruth is our reminder of this in Naomi's story. We have to move toward others and not push them away. And sometimes we need to be like Ruth and be the one who reaches out.

Naomi reminds us that in our pain and grief, Christ will be faithful to all His promises. He will not leave us without hope. Come Home and you will never be "Home Alone."

For Reflection

1. When have you been with others, but still felt alone?
2. In what way is God calling you back home as He called Naomi?

Action Steps

1. We see in Ruth 4:14-17 that other women encouraged Naomi.
Who are some people of faith who will encourage your faith and be your community?
2. Could you be like Ruth and volunteer to help others?

GriefShare Recovery Support Group

By Dr. Mark Smith

“You’ll discover hope for the future.”

Most people quickly feel comfortable and accepted in a GriefShare group. They discover there are others who have the same kind of feelings they do and who understand the hurt they feel and the loss they have experienced. Here is an overview of the GriefShare experience:

You’ll probably feel a little nervous about going to GriefShare the first time. Those feelings go away quickly for most people: usually during the first session they attend. GriefShare is a warm, caring environment designed to help you.

You’ll discover there are people who understand your hurts, emotions, and painful experiences. When someone you love dies, it’s common to feel isolated. In GriefShare, you’ll find that you are not alone, that there are others who understand what you are going through.

You’ll learn helpful, practical information that will help you recover from the pain of grief and loss. The GriefShare DVD videos feature top experts on grief recovery and case studies of people just like you who have been through the grief experience.

You’ll have the chance to talk about your experiences. It can be very healing to tell others what you are going through. The support group sessions include a time to talk about what you’ve



“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.”

– Isaiah 53:4

seen on the GriefShare videos and what is going on in your life. And while you have the opportunity to tell your story, there's never pressure for you to do so if you don't feel like it.

You'll have a workbook for personal study and to write things you've learned. The workbook provides an opportunity for further study about the grief process and personal reflection about your grief. The weekly journaling questions help you sort through your emotions. You can tear out and carry with you the perforated "Care Cards" for words of encouragement during the lowest parts of your day.

You'll begin to gain closure in your loss. It's sometimes hard to move on in life when you are still dealing with the grief and emptiness that happens after a loved one dies. You'll learn how to go through a healthy season of grieving, then begin transitioning to emotional and spiritual wholeness. We call this "your journey from mourning to joy."

You'll become part of a "family." GriefShare group members often say that they feel like their group has become a family: that they made new friends and are around people they can relate to.

You'll discover hope for the future. While things may look bleak now, you'll learn ways to restore your hope and rebuild your life. Many GriefShare alumni say the program helped them move from deep grief to peace and a sense of joy again.

For Reflection

1. Is it time to find out more information about GriefShare and how to discover hope?

Action Steps

1. Visit the GriefShare website at www.griefshare.org
2. Or call GriefShare at 800-395-5755.

The Blessing of Godly Friendships

By Dr. Ashley Allen

“One must think while Paul was in the jail in Rome, the thought of his friends at the church at Philippi brought a smile to his face and praise to God on his lips. We can be grateful to the Lord for the friends He has placed on our paths.”

I am a people person. By God’s design, I am extroverted, like people and enjoy talking with them and hearing their stories. While I typically enjoy time with all people, there are some people with whom I treasure my time and their friendship. They are my community of family and friends who are prayer warriors, encouragers, smile initiators, sense speakers, and those who I know I can count on in a pinch. I am grateful for a community that constantly reminds me of the hope that I have in Christ Jesus and who I can remind of the hope they have in Christ Jesus, too. Some of these friends live near, some live far away, and some are in heaven with the Lord and I look forward to seeing them again one day.

Paul, an apostle and missionary in the New Testament, became a follower of Christ later in life. He spent many of his years persecuting, and even killing Christians before he became one. Paul, like me, was single and his community of believers was extremely important to him. To top it off, Paul was also imprisoned many times because of his proclamation of the gospel. Often during those times of imprisonment, he was in solitary confinement or chained to a guard.



DAY
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“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart... ye all are partakers of my grace.”
– Philippians 1:3-7

Paul's relationships with people were crucial to helping him remember the hope he had in Christ Jesus. Paul wrote the book of Philippians while he was in a Roman prison. The book, which is a letter, was addressed to all the members of the church located in Philippi. Paul had been there when this church began (Acts 16) and he had been imprisoned in Philippi when the church first started. When he was released from prison that time, he went to the home where the church was meeting and encouraged his new brothers and sisters in Christ (Acts 16:40).

In his letter to the Philippian church, Paul writes that he thanks his God every time he remembers the Philippians (Phil. 1:3). One must think while Paul was in the jail in Rome, the thought of his friends at the church at Philippi brought a smile to his face and praise to God on his lips. We can be grateful to the Lord for the friends He has placed on our paths.

Paul also told this group of Christians that he prayed for them with joy because of their participation in the gospel. Remember this was the same group of Christians that Paul encouraged when he was released from prison in their city. Paul knew of their faithfulness to the Lord. They kept believing in God and what God said even when circumstances were difficult. Their actions were an encouragement to Paul and he praised God for their willingness to stay the course.

Finally, Paul wrote to the Philippians that it was appropriate that he feel this way about them because they were in his heart since "in both [his] imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, [they were] partakers of grace with [Paul]" (Phil. 1:7 ESV). Paul stood by his friends and his friends stood by him. They supported and encouraged one another. Additionally, these friends gave financially to Paul when he needed help (Phil. 4:15-16). The friendship Paul had with the Philippians was a true friendship that was first and foremost based on the relationship they all shared in Christ Jesus.

For Reflection

1. Who are friends, past and present, who you thank God for putting in your life?
2. Who around you needs a friend?
3. How can you reach out to that person and get to know them?

Action Steps

1. Identify people that you would like to get to know better. Invite them to dinner or for coffee.
2. Reach out, via phone or written notes, to people who have stood with you throughout your life and thank them.

Lifting the Weight of Loneliness

By Tiffany Capps

“Our Heavenly Father has a boundless presence and He does not fail to remain present even in times of loneliness.”

There is not a place on Earth without the presence of God! Even before God spoke the world into existence, His presence was there! In Psalm 139, the question is asked, “Whither shall I flee from thy presence?” The answer is there is no place where God is not present. We cannot escape His presence. Knowing and dwelling on this truth has brought me tremendous peace.

From my childhood until now, I have faced and dealt with loneliness. Although my reasons for feeling lonely varied through the years, they were not always due to the absence of people in my life. I have been in crowded rooms and not been spoken to; I have been to youth and adult functions where I didn’t feel I belonged; I have battled storms that were not understood by those closest to me. In each scenario, I felt alone, distraught, and discouraged. Though my feelings were legitimate, they were based on my expectations of earthly things and people. I failed to remember that God, my Heavenly Father, has a boundless presence and He does not fail to remain present: even in times of loneliness.

After I shift my focus from the things of this world that fade away to our everlasting God, hope begins to shine ever so brightly, quickly snuffing out feelings of loneliness, despair, and discouragement.



DAY
29

“Whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there... If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.”

– Psalm 139:7-12

At some point in life, everyone seems to encounter loneliness for different reasons. Whatever these reasons may be, Jesus desires to lift this heavy weight from our lives. In fact, He beacons us to come to Him when we are heavy with burdens and exchange them for what He has to offer. (Matthew 11:28-30) When we make this great exchange of giving over what weighs us down, we actually make a tremendous gain that, in effect, lifts us up. This exchange allows us to gain a peace that surpasses all understanding that guards our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:7). We gain rest in knowing that He is our ever present help in our time in need (Psalm 46:1). We gain timely comfort in any and all situations because God is the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). We gain assurance because God is faithful and never will He leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). We gain trust because Jesus is a friend like no other (John 15:13). And we gain seamless community and connection to the Father because in Christ, we have constant fellowship with the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14).

When loneliness strikes, know that you are not alone. When your heart breaks over the loneliness you feel, begin filling in those broken places with the unwavering truth of God's word. As you begin filling in those places with this truth that sets us free, you will begin to feel God lift this weight of loneliness from your life. He longs for you to run this race and not to become weary, to walk and not grow faint (Isaiah 40:30-31). God's word is true, it does not return void, and He is sure to fulfill every spoken word (Isaiah 55:11). So stand firm on His word and rest in His presence, because He is always there!

For Reflection

1. Which of the above verses apply most to your life right now?
2. How can these truths help lift the heavy weight of loneliness from your life?

Action Steps

1. Read and think about Phllipians 4:4-8.
2. Fill your heart and mind with God's truth by looking up and reading the referenced verses.

David's Cry—Is it Your Cry, Too?

By Dr. Mark Smith

“God uses every season of your life for your good and His glory.”

Do you ever feel like David described in today's scripture passage: like you are sinking into despair? Life has changed. It is not what it used to be. Family members have died or moved away. You have reached out to friends, tried to stay busy, but still there is a gaping hole inside of you filled with despair, loneliness and great uncertainty of the future.

King David in the Bible was known as “a man after God's own heart.” Too often, we view David as a superhero when, in reality, he was just like you and me. Sometimes he danced with joy; other times, he retreated in overwhelming fear or despair. One moment, he is worshipping God with reckless abandon. The next moment, he is hiding. We see him sin, and we see God forgive him. Failing to look at the humanness of David can blind us to the greatness, love, and graciousness of God.

Do you ever feel so lonely or sad that your heart screams inside you like a megaphone used at a large outside event? But, that your searing inner pain is an inside event, and you are the only one who hears?

While you are focused on survival, is it possible that you are missing the purpose God has for you in this season of life? God uses every season of your life for your good and His glory.



DAY
30

“Rescue me from the miry mud; don't let me sink. Let me be rescued from those who hate me and from the deep water. Don't let the floodwaters sweep over me or the deep swallow me up; don't let the Pit close its mouth over me. Answer me, LORD, for your faithful love is good. In keeping with your abundant compassion, turn to me.” – Psalm 69:14-16 CSB

For Reflection

1. Does God want to love others through you? Rather than simply survive, God is calling you to thrive in this season of life.

Action Step

1. Go for a prayer walk in your neighborhood or community. As you walk by where people live, ask the Lord to:
 - Bless them
 - Care for their needs
 - Help them overcome struggles in life
 - Give them peace
 - Show them His grace

Contributors

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In 2018, Dr. Sandy C. Gregory, director of North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry (NCBAM) created a task force of team members and advisors to study the epidemic of social isolation and loneliness affecting older adults in North Carolina and to explore ways that NCBAM could respond. Task force members researched programs such as the UK's *Silver Line* and California's *Daily Call Sheet*. They conferred with law enforcement and emergency responders, with aging service providers and government leaders across the state. They learned that many of North Carolina's aging go weeks without speaking to another person and that others feel lonely even in a crowd.

As they researched the complex causes of social isolation and loneliness, it became clear that the church holds vital keys to the solution: connection, community, and Christ. One Hope offers a spiritual response to isolation and loneliness by engaging churches and church volunteers in the fight to end loneliness.

The NCBAM Hope Line is manned by NCBAM staff and church volunteers who are eager to provide a listening ear to callers and encourage them with the truth that God sees them and loves them. All Hope Line volunteers are trained in active listening and other evidence-based health coach techniques.

Learn more about the many ministry tools available to churches at www.ncbam.org/ministry-outreaches.

ONE HOPE Task Force

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“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

– Ephesians 4:4-6 (NKJV)



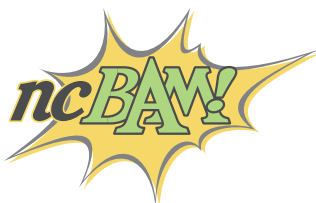
**If you are 65+ and experiencing loneliness or isolation,
please call the NCBAM Hope Line. Trained staff and
volunteers are ready to encourage you with a friendly voice
and a listening ear, to pray with you, and to remind you that**

God sees you and loves you!

866.578.4673

(866.578.HOPE)

onehopencbam.org



North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry

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A ministry of Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina

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