

Removing Aloneness in Relationships
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We're in a sermon series entitled Relationships: A Mess Worth Making. So far – we've seen that God created us for relationship with Him and other people – but sin affects every relationship negatively. That's why they can be so difficult and messy. Relationships can be a little bit of heaven on earth or a little bit of hell on earth!

That's why we need to be properly related to God through faith in Jesus Christ – knowing who He is in us and who we are in Him.
That's why we need to be grounded in the truth of God's Word.
That's why we need to be filled with God's Spirit.

Without faith in the finished work of Jesus – without the Word – without the Holy Spirit – we will usually mess up our relationships. But there is hope – because we have faith – we have the Word of God – we have the Spirit of God – so we can learn to have godly relationships!

But that will never happen without first being connected to God. And being connected to God automatically means you are connected to His family. That's because God created us for relationships.

We have an enemy named Satan and his goal to keep us disconnected from God's purposes for our lives. That's why some of you have such a hard time relating to God in worship! And that's why some of you have such a hard time relating to people. You excuse it by saying, "I'm not a people person." But that's a lie of the devil because God wired us to connect with people. We were created for community. We're formed for a family. Romans 12:5 says:

So we, numerous as we are, are one body in Christ and individually we are parts one of another (mutually dependent on one another).

Because of that, our enemy works overtime to disconnect us. He wants to isolate us so he can overcome us. Being alone and disconnected is never a good thing. That's why relationships are a mess worth making!

I'm preaching a message entitled Removing Aloneness in Relationships. You may think aloneness is not a big problem today. Wrong! According to a Gallup poll, four in ten Americans admit to frequent feelings of isolation and intense loneliness.

Why is there so much aloneness? Research show several reasons for the collapse of community in America –
Disruption of families through divorce and 2-career families

Urban sprawl and commuting time

Electronic media – especially TV

Whatever the reasons – the bottom line is that we are surrounded by lonely people.

This affects every area of life in America – families, neighborhoods - even church-
The sad thing is – aloneness kills people – literally. A dozen studies worldwide show that people who are socially disconnected – totally alone – are between 2-5 times more likely to die from all causes than those who are connected to other people.

By the way, a recent Harvard study shows that regular church attendance leads to longer life, better health and marital stability. The researchers found that people who went to church more than once a week, had a 33% lower risk of dying during the study period, compared with those who said they never went. The reasons behind this are that those who attend church have increased social support and a more optimistic outlook on life. That's why we've decided to change our church slogan from "touching heaven changing earth" to "join or die!"

Aloneness is a huge problem. By the way – did you know that the first problem in the garden of Eden was not sin – it was aloneness! Sin did not enter the world until Gen. 3 – but in Gen. 2 God said "It is not good for man to be alone."

Seven times in the first chapter of the Bible God calls what He made good. Then, for the first time, God said something was not good. Genesis 2:18 says:

The Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

According to God – aloneness is not good. If God says something is not good – it is not good.

This is an amazing announcement considering the following:

- Adam lived in a perfect world - No crime, no traffic, no pollution, no disease, no war, no sin. This was all good.
- Everything in the garden was for Adam to use and enjoy.
- Adam ruled over everything with no competition.
He had no in-laws or out-laws.
- Adam enjoyed an uninterrupted intimate relationship with God.
This was all good.

Yet!! God said in the midst of all this goodness, something was not good. It was not good for man to be alone. God created us with the need for human relationship.

When I was younger I felt I was needless. I didn't feel I needed other people. I twisted Scriptures like "God will supply all your need" to mean all I need is God.

What would you say if I told you that I learned that we are Biblically incorrect when we say: "God is all we need." We say this all the time - yet is it true? If God is all you need then do you need to eat today? Do you need water? Or do you need to sleep? God created us with certain needs...for food... water... sleep... oxygen and other people. 1 Corinthians 12:20-21 says:

But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

God created the church as a body whose members need each other. So many times we tell people, "Just go to God" when God is saying, "But I sent you down that road to minister to them." God ministers through people much of the time.

The point I am trying to make is we need God and each other. Yes, God is the One who meets our needs. However, sometimes He meets some needs through other people. Take Philippians 4:19 for example. Paul says:

God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

As I said – I would use this Scripture to say, "God is all you need." But then I read the context of the Scripture in verses 16 & 18 where Paul says to the church at Philippi:

You sent [me contributions] for my needs, not only once but a second time... I have everything I need and am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent me. They are the fragrant odor of an offering and sacrifice which God welcomes and in which He delights.

Then comes the verse about God supplying all your needs. The point is – sometimes God meets our needs directly and sometimes He meets them indirectly through other people. So, you cannot go through life saying, "I don't need anyone else" because you are created to need other people and God meets needs through other people.

By the way – God did not say in Genesis, "It is not good to be single." In fact – the Bible teaches that it is better to be single because you can focus on the Lord without having to focus on a spouse. But I want you to see that the issue here is not marriage – it about relationships!

By the way, marriage does not fix all your problems – in fact it compounds some problems! Some guys think that getting married will fix their porn problem. Wrong! Some ladies think that getting married will fix their loneliness problem. Not necessarily!

That's why the title of my message is Removing Aloneness IN Relationships. I didn't call it Removing Aloneness THROUGH Relationships.

This message is not for those who are lonely because they have no relationships – this is for those who feel alone IN their relationships.

You can feel alone in a crowd!

You can feel alone in a marriage and family!

You can feel alone in a church!

This is not good. God said it is not good for us to be alone – so we need to figure out how to minister to aloneness.

One of the reasons people feel alone is that they don't know how to initiate, build and maintain relationships. We'll be teaching on that through this series.

The other reason is that they may be in a relationship – but the person they are in a relationship with does not know how to remove their aloneness.

That's something Deb and I have had to work on. One of our problems is that I was raised to be a thinker and she is more emotional. So – I tend to discount emotion – which makes her feel discounted by me and disconnected from me.

Many times she would say that she felt alone in our relationship and it would really frustrate me because I was sitting right there talking to her. In my logical mind she was not alone. So – in addition to trying to talk her out of her feelings – I would try to convince her that she was not alone.

Then our counselor helped me greatly. First, he showed me a chart of feelings that gives different words for feelings. For the feeling of aloneness – it gave words like disconnected, insignificant and abandoned. That really helped me to see how Deb could feel alone. Then he really got me when he shared two scriptures. Hebrews 2:17-18 says:

It was essential that He be made like His brethren in every respect, in order that He might become a merciful (sympathetic) and faithful High Priest in the things related to God, to make atonement for the people's sins. For because He Himself has suffered in being tempted (tested and tried), He is able (immediately) to run to the cry of (assist, relieve) those who are being tempted and tested and tried.

Wow! This really convicted me when I saw that Jesus became one of us so that He could be merciful and sympathetic to us. Then the counselor read Hebrews 4:15:

For we do not have a High Priest Who is unable to understand and sympathize and have a shared feeling with our weaknesses and infirmities, but One Who has been tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sinning.

That convicted me that I was refusing to share Deb's feelings, but Jesus was

willing to share those very feelings. Who was I to deny feelings that Jesus understood and shared? I saw my sin, repented (a change of mind that leads to a change in behavior) and I started working on being understanding, sympathetic and empathetic towards my wife.

Building empathy requires truly caring about what others are feeling. When you first get to know someone – you show a lot of care about their feelings and what is important to them. But later, we tend to focus more on ourselves and our feelings. However, when you disregard someone’s feelings as unimportant, you are actually disregarding them.

I try to be a good husband but many times I do that according to my definition of a good husband. If it’s not my wife’s definition – if I’m not speaking her love language – she will still feel alone and unloved – no matter how hard I try. I had to realize that I’m only a good husband when my wife feels loved by me. And that only happens when I listen to her, understand her and value her. We must learn to value other people’s feelings.

I’m not a very feeling-oriented person – so I usually don’t respond well to my wife’s feelings. I try to talk her out of them or give a head response to a heart message. When I do that – she feels alone and unloved.

She wants a conversation – not a solution.

She wants a hearing ear – not fix-it advice.

It’s frustrating to me because I’m just trying to help. So that just causes me to shut down and give up. But I’ve had to learn to die to myself to produce life in her.

I had to learn to value her feelings rather than devalue them.

I had to learn to appreciate her rather than analyze her.

I had to learn to say things like, “I can see how upsetting that is for you. I’m so sorry that happened.”

As I enter into her feelings I communicate care to her. When I remove her aloneness – we can build intimacy in our relationship.

Intimacy in relationship with God and other persons is the antidote for aloneness. But, what is intimacy? In our society, the meaning of the word is often distorted many people assume that intimacy refers only to physical or sexual encounters.

But intimacy has a much deeper meaning. It is primarily about knowing and being known for the right reasons and with the right motivations. It means to have deep awareness and understanding of another. That requires vulnerable communication where we share personal things like our hopes, aspirations, dreams, fears, regrets, and losses.

Not only does intimacy involve communication, but also caring. God’s motive for intimate relationships is active, engaging, caring love.

Why should we seek to enter into our friend's world?
 Why should we prioritize time for our loved ones?
 Why give sacrificially to others in the church?
 Because we care about them. Why? Because God cares about them!

It is not because of duty or obligation, and certainly not to manipulate or take for our own benefit. Such selfless, other-centered giving is not natural. Instead, it is supernatural, coming from Christ, who said in Matthew 10:8:

Freely you have received, freely give.

This is hard to do because we tend to see people as fallen and sinful, but we need to also see them as alone. We must look beyond their faults and sins and see their needs.

So, our first priority in ministering to others is removing aloneness. The main thing that removes aloneness is empathy – feeling for them and feeling with them. Empathy is to understand and enter into another person's pain. The key scripture is Romans 12:15 –

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

How do we do this? We must practice the Zacchaeus Principle – deal with aloneness first – then with sinfulness.

Luke 19 tells the story of a tax collector named Zacchaeus. Jewish people hated being under Roman rule and they hated the Jews who collected taxes for the Romans. They considered them to be traitors and thieves. As a result, tax collectors got wealthy, but they had no friends.

Luke 19:1-10 tells how Jesus passed through Jericho and everyone wanted to see him – including Zacchaeus. But he was too short to see so he climbed up a tree to see Jesus. When Jesus reached the spot, He looked up and said to him,

*"Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."
 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"
 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*

Zacchaeus was suffering from sinfulness and aloneness. But which did Jesus minister to first? Aloneness. Jesus stopped – looked and listened and it changed Zacchaeus' life forever. He said "Zach – come on down – I want to hang out with you for awhile." After he did - Zacchaeus then dealt with his sinfulness.

So – we must stop, look and listen to people. We must look for signs of aloneness – rejection, loss, divorce, grief We must listen for words of aloneness. “I can’t go on – I can’t do this anymore – I can’t make it on my own.” Then – we must simply be there for people.

There is a time to address sin and a place for speaking truth – but sometimes we just need to be there for people first. One of the names for the Holy Spirit is the Paraclete – the one who is called alongside us in time of need. That’s the ministry of the Spirit that we need to enter into to remove people’s aloneness.

People all around you are lonely. They may not admit it and they may not even be aware of it. But when you see aloneness – stop, look and listen. Then just be there.

Some of you today are feeling alone today. Please realize that relationships are God’s antidote for aloneness. Psalm 68:6 says *God places lonely people in families.* And the church is the family of God!

So – press through your fear and reach out to others in the family!

But always remember – relationship with others flows out of your relationship with God. You see – God knows you better than anyone! He knew you from your mother’s womb and He is acquainted with your every thought, emotion, and motivation. Yet He loves you anyway!

In fact, Romans 5:8 says:

God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Others may have conditional love for you – but God loves you unconditionally!

Others may leave you - but God will never leave you or forsake you!

Others may turn on you - but God is always for you, not against you!

Others may curse you - but God will always bless you!

Others may stop loving you – but nothing will ever separate you from the love of God!

And when you know that love – you can love others as Christ loved you!

Your aloneness will be removed and so will theirs!