



The End of Loneliness

by Desmond Ford

Human beings are like porcupines.
They love to get together even though it hurts.

Sometimes it hurts terribly to mix with our fellow human beings. One character in literature says, "The more I sees of other people, the more I love myself." Charles Schulz has one of his cartoon characters say, "I love humanity, it's people I can't stand."

Even Jeremiah the prophet experienced something like that when he wrote in his ninth chapter:

Let everyone beware of his neighbor,
... and put no trust in any brother;
for every brother is a supplanter,
and every neighbor goes about as
a slanderer.

(v.4 See vv.1-5 RSV)

There are times when each of us summarizes all other people as being like that. Yet one of the greatest sorrows that can come to anybody is the sorrow of loneliness.

We Are Never Alone—In the very opening pages of Scripture, we have God saying, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gn 2:18). Is loneliness your problem?

The first thing I must say is that in reality none of us is ever really alone. To understand that will take much of the sting out of loneliness.

From the age of nine, in the mercy of God, I have sensed the presence of God. That presence has often been clouded by my sins and by my unbelief. Yet I remember the new life that came at that age because of the gospel. Some of you have known that presence much longer than I.

When Sir Ernest Shackleton, the British explorer, went on his last voyage [to Enderby Land in 1922] he took with him a gramophone. Though renowned for traveling

light, he took the gramophone and the famous record of Dame Clara Buck singing, "Abide With Me."

Can you think what it must have been like when across those icebound antarctic, there rang out the words:

I need Thy presence every passing
hour;

What but Thy grace can foil the
tempter's power?

Who like Thyself my guide and
stay can be?

Through cloud and sunshine, O
abide with me!

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to
bless;

Ills have no weight, and tears no
bitterness:

Where is death's sting? where
grave, thy victory?

I triumph still if Thou abide with
me!

The Blessing of the Presence of the Heavenly Father—There is simply no blessing like the blessing of the constant awareness of the presence of our heavenly Father. Our God is One who, for Christ's sake, has accepted us just as we are with all our sins, failures, and weaknesses. One who does not see in us the likeness of the sinner but the likeness of his Son in whom we believe. One who is always for us and never against us.

There is no blessing in all the world like the awareness of the presence of that One. Even a heathen king got a glimpse of it on one occasion. He persecuted the Hebrew worthies and threw them into the burning fiery furnace. Suddenly he stood up amazed and confounded and said, "Didn't we throw in three? But I see four men in the furnace, loose, walking. And the form of the fourth is like the Son of God," (see Daniel 3:24-25).

Two Heresies—There are lots of heresies that don't matter much in a practical sense. There are two heresies about the presence of God that matter very much.

At the beginning of the Bible you have Adam saying, "I was afraid, so I hid" (Gn 3:10). This is the heresy that God was there but not here.

When you turn the page you have Cain saying, "Don't send me away because I'll be away from your presence" (see Genesis 4:13-14). This is the heresy that God is here but not there.

These are two terrible heresies. "God is there, in the high heaven, or within the church with that good man or that good woman, but God's not here. Not with this sinner." That is a terrible heresy. The truth is, Christ goes to be guest with him or her that is a sinner. Christ is always here.

The other heresy says, "Well, Christ's here but not there. If I go yonder, Christ can't come with me." The truth is, Christ is willing to travel with us wherever we go.

While lots of heresies don't matter, these particular ones have very practical impact. The heresies we oppose should be those that take away peace, joy, gladness, and the

willing service and obedience of the believer.

Jacob a Victim of Heresy—Do you remember Jacob was a victim of one of these heresies? He was out in the desert alone, missing mother's apple pie, missing the family, and the local friends. With a stone for a pillow, he dreamed in his loneliness. To his amazement, a ladder was let down from heaven, and he saw the angels of God ascending and descending. In joy, Jacob awoke and said, "Lo, God is in this place and I knew it not. This is the gate of heaven." It became Bethel, the house of God (see Genesis 28:16-17).

Every place is a Bethel. Every place is at the foot of that ladder, for Christ is the ladder. Christ's incarnation at Bethlehem is a fitting symbol of the way God is always coming down to us. He meets us in our need wherever we are. We are never really alone. There is Someone who loves us. Someone who died for us. Someone who gives us his Spirit, gives us his righteousness, and sends his angels to minister.

We are never less alone than when we think we are alone. God says to us in Isaiah 43:2:

When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through
the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.

He has not promised that it will always be easy. There will be floods, but he promises they won't drown us. There will be fires, but he says they won't devour us. There will be valleys of the shadow of death, but we will pass through the valley of the shadow of death and learn that shadows can't hurt us.

Fear of Shadows—Most of the things we fear are shadows. And loneliness is a situation of fear. We fear it's always going to be as sad and tragic as at this moment and perhaps much worse. But that fear is a shadow, it's not reality. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I'll fear no evil, for thou art with me." He's always with us.

The classic, *Scapegoat*, by Sir Hall Caine, tells of little Naomi. She was

blind, deaf, and mute. Her mother had died. She lived with her father who was an alien in a foreign land. Often in the night, the father would awake to find this tiny figure in her white nightgown standing by his bed. Night and day were the same to her. She didn't know why she came, except she wanted to know that he was near. Likewise, there is Someone who loves us who is always near.

How to Be Sure of God's Presence:

One: The Morning Watch—How can we know the presence of God continually? First, form the habit of the morning watch.

No musician plays a professional concert and then comes home to tune up. Yet many a person lives his day and leaves his devotions for the end of the day. If you are like me, you are good-for-nothing at the end of the day, neither good for God nor humans. I do not believe anybody can live a Christian life without giving God time at the beginning of the day. At least enough time that God might become more real than anything that will happen that day.

Strangely, people expect God to give them eternity when they are not prepared to give God fifteen minutes a day. We are what we think about all day. What we think about at the beginning of the day usually puts its mold upon all our later thoughts.

The Bible is full of the thought of the presence of God. Psalm 125:2 says, "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people." So God *surrounds* me to protect me. Deuteronomy 4:39 says, "The Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below." God is *above* to watch over me and *below* on earth beside me to care for me. Deuteronomy 33:27 says, "The eternal God is your refuge, and *underneath* are the everlasting arms." God is not only above me, and beside me, he is underneath to hold me up. Exodus 13:21 says, "By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so they could travel by day or night." Where is God? He is going before us. He is always there.

Two: Ask God to Incline Your Will to Obedience—in all things you know to be right. He doesn't require of us what we don't know unless we can know it.

When Christ was asked, "Lord, how are you going to manifest yourself to us?" he answered, "If a man loves me, he will keep my words. My Father will come to him and I will come to him. We will abide with him" (see John 14:22-23).

By "keeping his words" Jesus did not just mean remember. He meant performance, obedience. It is impossible to feel the loving presence of God if we are in knowing disobedience to his will. Obedience never buys salvation, but you can lose salvation by a course of willful disobedience.

Three: Practice the habit of ejaculatory prayer

—What does that mean? God doesn't measure prayers by their length. He doesn't measure them by their number. He measures them by their intensity and sincerity. The real prayer life is not a prolonged time upon one's knees but the habit of speaking to God briefly about everything. Whatever you are doing, with your eyes wide open, you can speak to him about—anything that worries or distresses, that rejoices, that perplexes.

The habit of ejaculatory prayer is a very precious habit. It is an essential habit if we are to feel and know the presence of God. How dare we ignore the greatest, the most august, the most wonderful of all presences! How dare we ignore God! If we know God, we should be speaking to him continually about everything.

Four: Repeat God's Promises Continually—When you read Scripture and find something that touches your heart, form a good habit. Write out what you found, and write it out several times. Put it in your pocket or purse and carry it with you. Read it during the day. Let the words of Christ become permanent possessions of your soul. Then the Spirit will bring them to remembrance



when most needed. Repeat God's promises continually.

Five: Seek to Serve and Share — David Fink wrote a magnificent book *Release from Nervous Tension*. See what he says: "A person with an attitude of seeking only to serve, cannot be nervous."

When you are lonely, you are also nervous. Unless you are happy, you cannot be healthy in mind or soul. Yet a person with the attitude of seeking only to serve cannot be nervous. He has nothing to lose. No aggression can arouse hostility that he must repress. Losing himself, he finds himself. Servant of all humanity, he knows no master.

It's a strange thing, but that which you and I most want we can only find by looking for something

else. All happiness is a by-product, like coke (the fuel, not the drink). If you search solely for happiness, you never find it. When people go out to share and give, they suddenly find all their own needs are met.

Six: Worship Regularly with Other Believers—Worship is tremendously important. We read of Moses: "Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone" (Ex 34:29). Then we read

of Samson, "He wist not that the Lord was departed from him" (Judges 16:20). Samson's strength was gone. When Moses went in to see God, his face shone with beauty and strength. When Samson was with God, he had great strength.

For glory, and for might, we need the experience of being with God. There is no substitute for that.

Worship with other believers and worship regularly. The coal removed from the fire will go out very speedily. We need each other. We are members one of another, and in finding ourselves, we find God, and in finding God, we find each other.

Summary—To avoid loneliness, practice the presence of God. Read the Scriptures and keep the morning watch. Ask God to incline your will to obey. Learn to pray. Repeat God's promises. Seek to serve and to share. Worship with others. Your loneliness will flee away. ❖

[Excerpted from Dr. Ford's book *Worth More Than a Million*, chapter 51, "Is Loneliness Your Problem?" pp. 639-649.]