

"Never Alone"

Living alone presents many emotional and spiritual challenges. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders; and this is a Bible study, "In Search of the Lord's Way." And today we're exploring what God desires for those who live alone. Stay with us.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way; we're here to search the Scriptures to find out the will of God. This is God's instruction book for everyone, in every stage of life, and in every circumstance. Whatever struggle or heartache that you face, God has some comfort and help for you. He hasn't forgotten or abandoned you. He knows and cares about you. Thanks for studying with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Many years ago, I did a funeral for an elderly man who had no family at all. Three funeral directors and I carried his casket to the graveside service; two ladies from the nursing home and I sang some hymns. No one else attended. Six people, no family, no friends! This man was utterly alone and buried by strangers.

Loneliness is a growing problem in our society. More than 44 percent of all adults in the United States are unmarried; that's 102 million people. A study by the American Council of Life Insurance reported that the most lonely group in America are college students. That's surprising! The survey next listed divorced people, welfare recipients, single mothers, rural students, housewives, and the elderly. Loneliness is a widespread problem; and in fact, one in four people complain about feeling lonely frequently. Now, persistent loneliness can harm our mental and our physical health.

The LORD God said in Genesis 2 and verse 18, "It's not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." Living without a spouse is difficult, whether you've never married, become a widow, or have been divorced. Loneliness is painful and can confuse you into thinking that you are a loser or an outcast, but that's not necessarily so.

If you want to study more about this topic, we offer the information on this program free. And if you'd like a printed copy or CD of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an email to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number; and that number is 1-800-321-8633. Now, if you live outside the United States, we have materials free online. Please be sure to visit our website: www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song; we'll read from Psalm 139, verses 1 to 5, and we'll see how we are never alone.

Our reading today comes from one of the Psalms of David, Psalm 139, verses 1 through 5. "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all. You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me." Aren't you glad that God is so close? Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that no matter where we are that You're with us, that Your hand encloses us, that You know us so well. Father, we're grateful for that loving care. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!

Loneliness makes people feel sad and empty, cut off from others and needing companionship. Loneliness typically includes anxiety because people need to connect with family. We all need a companion who shares our lives and dreams, who walks through life with us, who experiences our joys

and sorrows, and who shares our responsibilities and decisions. Connecting with another is more than living in the same house. One can feel lonely even when surrounded by other people.

The Bible tells of several people who lived lonely lives. Joseph, the son of Jacob, grew up in a large family; but you remember, his half-brothers hated him so much that they sold him into slavery. At a young age, he lived as a stranger in a foreign land, Egypt. His master's wife tried repeatedly to seduce him. And when he refused her advances, she falsely accused him and he spent years in prison, separated from home and family. I can only imagine how Joseph must have felt. However, Genesis 39 and verse 21 says, "But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer." Whatever Joseph endured, the Lord was with him. The Lord protected and provided for him what he needed, even if his family was far away. Joseph was able to endure his hardships and keep his faith, because he knew the Lord was with him.

Jesus walked alone much of his life. He never had a wife and children, but gave Himself completely to His mission of saving people from sin. Jesus had people all around Him all of His life. He grew up in a household with several brothers and sisters. He chose and trained twelve disciples who accompanied Him in His ministry. Jesus often stayed in the home of friends like Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Multitudes followed Him wherever He went. But in spite of all this, Jesus faced much of life alone and did what no other person could do. He went to the cross alone. While praying at Gethsemane, you remember, His disciples fell asleep. His familiar friend, Judas, betrayed Him; Peter denied Him three times; and the rest were scattered from Him.

Like Joseph Jesus found strength in His relationship with His Father in heaven. You remember Jesus said in John 16 and verse 32, "Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; (He says) and yet I'm not alone, because the Father is with Me." Jesus found the strength that He needed in the Father, and so can you. Peter revealed how Jesus dealt with lonely suffering. In 1 Peter 2, verses 21 to 23 the Bible says, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth; and while being reviled, He didn't revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." When Jesus suffered most, He put His life and His soul into the hands of the heavenly Father. And there He found comfort and support.

Jesus began and ended His ordeal on the cross with prayer. Of course, He prayed for three hours while in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Lord Jesus prayed in Luke 22 and verse 42, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." While Jesus wanted to escape the cross on one hand, He wanted to do the will of the Father on the other. And His desire to fulfill the Father's will was greater and His true prayer, because of His love for His Father was "Thy will be done." Hebrews 5 and verse 7 says that, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence." In His pain and sorrow, the Father heard His reverent and obedient prayer.

As they were crucifying the Lord Jesus, you remember, He was praying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they're doing" (Luke 23 and verse 34). Now instead of focusing on their cruelty and the overwhelming pain of large nails going through His hands and feet, Jesus was thinking about their souls. Jesus prayed for them to be forgiven. We often focus on the evil and the ugly in life, but Jesus focused on saving people from their sins.

In Matthew 27 and verse 46, the Lord Jesus "cried out with a loud voice, saying ... 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' " Did you know that these are words from Psalm 22 and verse 1.

Psalm 22 is the most Messianic of all the psalms of David. It begins with a feeling of forsakenness; it speaks of the wagging of the head in verse 7; predicts the piercing of His hands and feet in verse 16; and speaks of the dividing of His garments in verse 18. But verse 27 speaks of all the nations turning to and worshiping the Lord. Could it be the Lord Jesus was reciting this Scripture to Himself and reassuring Himself that His death was not in vain?

Jesus kept entrusting Himself to the Father. In fact, Luke 23 and verse 46 says, "Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last." From the beginning to the end of this excruciating ordeal, Jesus found His strength in prayer. His example will help us in our times of pain and loneliness. First Peter 4 and verse 19 says, "Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." When you're lonely, entrust your soul to a Creator who will not let you down.

The apostle Paul provides another example for those who live as singles. While some think he may have been married at some point in his life, he speaks of himself as being unmarried. He said in 1 Corinthians 7 and verse 8, "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am." You see, he realized that not everyone had the gift to live the single life yet he felt there were many advantages to living as a single. Paul knew that having family would get in the way of his ministry, and he wanted to be free of any responsibility except to the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul often faced great difficulties. They put Paul in prison five times, and he spent about five years of his life in jail. Now, if you read through the book of Philippians, you wouldn't think of Paul as depressed or defeated even though he was in prison when he wrote it. Instead, he spoke of his joy in that letter more than twenty times.

Paul, you see, learned the secret of being content in whatever circumstances he found himself. Now, in context, Philippians 4 is speaking of Paul's financial wellbeing; but this is likely true of other circumstances of his life. He explains in Philippians 4, verses 12 to 13, "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." Paul found God's grace was sufficient for him, even when he was suffering. You see, having God in his life made up for all the things that he didn't have.

Paul also understood what it's like to face death alone. God spared Paul's life the first time he appeared before Caesar. And Paul said in 2 Timothy 4, verses 16 to 18, "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

When you're lonely, think on the promises of God. They will reassure you. The Lord God said in Psalm 68, verses 5 to 6, "A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation. God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity, Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land." If you have God with you, you have far more than many of the largest families. The Lord Jesus promised in Matthew 28 and verse 20, "and lo, I'm with you always, even to the end of the age." The Lord Jesus dwells with His people. I love the Lord's promise in John 14 and verse 23 that, "If anyone keeps me, loves me rather, he will keep my word, and my Father will love

him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." You see the Father and the Lord Jesus make their home with those who love Him enough to obey Him.

The Lord God promised Joshua in Joshua 1 and verse 5, "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you." Now, this promise is repeated to Christians in Hebrews 13 and verse 5. David said in Psalm 37 and verse 25, "I've been young, and now I'm old, yet I've not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread." You see, what's true in practical matters is also true in our relationship with the Lord. David said in Psalm 27 and verse 10, "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, But the LORD will take me up." When no one else was there for David, God was.

God said to the people of Jerusalem through the prophet Isaiah in chapter 49, verses 15 to 16, "Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me." God thinks continually of His children. He thinks of their physical welfare, their spiritual strength, and their emotional needs. The Lord Jesus reminds us in Matthew 6 and verse 8 that "your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." Oh, the Lord is a blessing to all of us.

David kept himself aware of the presence of God. Now, our reading today came from Psalm 139, verses 1 to 5. He said, "O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me." David describes how intimately God knew him. God knew everything about him, how he acted, how he talked, even what he thought about. David said in verse 6 that, "Such knowledge is too wonderful to me, for me; it's high; and I cannot attain it."

God had known David from his conception in his mother's womb. In Psalm 139, verses 13 to 14 David says, "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; and my soul knows it very well." No one knows you and me as intimately as God. He's watched over us every day of our lives, heard every prayer, known every thought, and provided every need. You cannot go anywhere outside the presence of God.

Well, how does this help? Because you too can say, "I'm not alone; the Lord is with me." You too can say His grace is sufficient for you. You too can say He will never leave you or forsake you. Oh, give yourself to God! Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that You love us so much, that You provide for every need, and that You're with us through every trial of life. This we give thanks to You in the name of Jesus. Amen!

The outspoken atheist, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, who went to court to take prayer out of the schools, clearly sensed something was missing from her life. She wrote in her diary in 1977 that she had failed as a wife, as a parent, and as a politician. And in a half dozen places in her diaries O'Hair wrote, "Somebody, somewhere, love me." We all long to love and to be loved. And there's one place in your heart and soul that no one can fill but God. You see, the most lonely person in the world isn't the one who lacks family, but the one who has rejected God.

Some folks allow their love for God to fade as years pass. The Lord Jesus said to the lukewarm church at Laodicea in Revelation 3 and verse 20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; and if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me." The Lord Jesus wanted to restore the warm and intimate fellowship He once had with the church in

Laodicea, and He wants to have that same intimacy with you. Do you have a close, loving, peaceful relationship with the Lord?

Draw close to God; make Him part of your life every day! Become a Christian by placing your faith and your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He will never lie to you and wants to save you from your sins. And out of love, repent of your sins by forsaking them and following the Lord. Confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ, united with Him. We're crucified with Christ in baptism that our body of sin might be done away with according to Romans 6, verses 3 to 7. God washes away our sins in baptism according to Acts 22 and verse 16. Oh, become a Christian today!

We hope that today's study about God's presence in our life has stirred your heart. We hope you'll think about what we've studied. And if you live in the United States and want a free printed copy or CD of this message, then mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an email to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now, if you live outside the United States, you can download our material and you can get those materials at www.searchtv.org. We also offer free Bible correspondence courses. Now, don't worry, we won't ask you for money or put you on a list.

Please get involved with a church of Christ. They love and support our ministry. Now, if you're looking for a Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Churches of Christ want guests, and you'll be glad you worshiped with them. Well, we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word and tell a friend about the program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.