



### Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



### Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

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### Who Cares When ... HG152 I'm Feeling All Alone?

2 Timothy 4:9-18

Home Group Study Notes

8 October 2017 - Pauline Woolnough



**PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



### Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

Besides the Bible, what 3 things would you want with you if you were in prison?



### Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



*Who Cares When ...*  
**HG152 I'm Feeling All Alone?**

2 Timothy 4:9-18

Home Group Sermon

8 October 2017 - Pauline Woolnough

**Introduction**

Mother Teresa once said: *"The biggest disease today is not leprosy or cancer or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for and deserted by everybody."* Recent research indicates that this may be the next biggest public health issue on a par with obesity and substance abuse. A survey by the Mental Health Foundation found that in the UK one in ten of us feels lonely often, and 48 per cent of us think we are getting lonelier in general. In fact Britain has been voted the loneliness capital of Europe. Although its commonly known that loneliness particularly affects the elderly who may be socially isolated it also effects people at all ages, including children, and is particularly prevalent in the teenage years.

There are many reasons for this and the changes in modern society are thought to be the cause. For example we live in nuclear family units, often living large distances away from our extended family and friends and we increasingly rely on social technology rather than face to face interaction. Its not uncommon for us to have hundreds of *"friends"* on our social media pages but how many would we actually recognise if we passed them in the street! Our relationships are becoming more superficial and less rewarding. Of course there is nothing wrong with being alone. The introverts amongst us are predisposed to enjoy our own company over being in a crowd, and this is perfectly healthy but loneliness is not. Few emotions are more painful than the emotion of loneliness and we will all suffer from it at some time because life throws up so many situations that trigger this emotion.

**Paul's struggle with loneliness**

In AD67 due to persecution, Paul was in a dark, damp Roman prison most likely the infamous Mamertine Prison overlooking the ruins of the Roman forum. He would have been stripped of all his clothing except his tunic, then let down through a trap door in the floor by ropes under his armpits and chained in pitch black darkness unless someone supplied an oil lamp. We can get a glimpse of the courage of this spiritual giant during the most lonely and dark time of his life when he was surrounded by enemies, and deserted by friends. This passage reflects his own struggle with loneliness, his need for companionship and the importance of relationships towards the brutal end of his life.

**Paul's need of friends**

Paul was suffering physical and emotional pain, he was also suffering the pain of betrayal. Incredibly, despite having spent time listening to the man who wrote about 2/3 of the New Testament his friend Demas had deserted him reminding us of Judas betraying Jesus. Being betrayed and feeling let down is hard and some of the toughest times in our lives come when those we love let us down but it works both ways. There will have been times in our lives when we will have let friends and loved ones down too.

4. Do you ever have *"desert experiences"* when you feel distant from God? If so what do you do to deal with them and navigate out of the *"desert?"*

5. God cares when we are feeling lonely. Can you think of a time when your feelings have led you not to believe this?

6. How can we identify or recognise the most lonely among us, how can we and our Home Groups help them?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. What is the most important relationship in your life?

2. Paul was alone in prison, facing death and missing his friends. Can you share your own experiences of feeling lonely?

3. John Ortberg implies that admitting our loneliness to others can make us look like a “*loser*.” Why do we sometimes find it difficult to share our struggles with people in the church?

Three other friends Crescens, Titus and Tychicus received Paul’s blessings as they were engaged in other missionary assignments, but he mentions 3 particular Christian friends that he needed at this time, Luke, Mark and Timothy. In v 11 he says “*Only Luke is with me,*” it sounds rather disparaging but we shouldn't read that as if Luke is not enough, Luke is the “*dearly loved physician*” a loyal friend and companion and perhaps the one who was writing the letter to Timothy for Paul. He was a true friend and stayed near to Paul as death approached. Mark’s story is encouraging to us as he failed on Paul’s first missionary journey choosing to go home rather than continue and took him out of favour. Paul felt betrayed by Mark, yet something happened to restore the friendship and give us hope. Despite rejection, hurt and failure Mark is restored and was not only useful to Paul but to God as he wrote the gospel of Mark. Christ can always restore us by his grace, and of course Paul wants Timothy to come. Timothy is mentioned more than any other person in the greetings of Paul’s letters, they had a very close friendship and by the way that he always mentioned people in his letters we see that Paul valued people and friendship. He cherished and needed human friendship and while his ultimate desire was to see his Saviour, he still wanted to see Timothy. John Stott notes that these two desires are not incompatible when he says,

*“One sometimes meets super spiritual people who claim that they never feel lonely and have no need for friends, for the companionship of Christ satisfies all their needs. But human friendship is the loving provision of God for mankind.”*

While Christ died so that we could enjoy him forever, he did not set aside our friendships and fellowship with believers, he created it. Jesus never intended that the enjoyment of his presence would replace that of Christian friends.

### Our own need of friends

I personally struggled with loneliness for about 5 years when I left home to live in Essex. Although Alan still had his family and friends around him I had left everyone I knew and loved when I left Edinburgh. It was only when I made friends through a home group that I finally started to put down roots. I truly felt that those friends were a gift from the Lord as he knew my need. I had Him in my life but I needed human friendships too. We should never tell others that God should be enough. While a relationship with God goes a long way to alleviate the pain of loneliness, we were created to be in relationship and our faith doesn't make up for long evenings with no-one to talk to, no one to go on holiday with and painful longings for human companionship. Dismissing someone’s feeling by telling them that God is enough will only make them feel more inadequate, isolated and unimportant because God designed human beings to be in relationship with others with Jesus at the heart of our friendships. From the very beginning, God said that it was *'not good for man to be alone.'* Gen 1:25

### Alone on your own

Churches are in a unique position to build healthy communities that can help to alleviate loneliness and embrace everyone but one group of people who don't always have the best experience is single people. They often feel isolated and invisible and while families and couples tend to socialise together single people don't always get invited. If they get a partner strangely enough the invitations start coming. Single women especially can be seen a threat to other women and whilst many ministries can focus on marriage, toddlers, children’s groups and youth clubs, single adults can feel invisible. Its something we need to be constantly aware of.

### Alone in a crowd

Probably one of the worst times to experience loneliness is when you are in a crowd or a group of people and church is no exception. Lots of people have said to me that the time after the service when we have tea and coffee is a difficult time for them, they feel a bit lost among a sea of people who are seemingly all engaged in interesting and fascinating conversations.

Its hard to break in and you start to feel awkward and self conscious, feeling it's time to make a dash for the door. Us introverts find this time incredibly hard. Introverts are drained by being in large groups of people and having time on their own, or in one to one conversations is what energises them, so again we just need to be mindful of others around us who although they may want to, don't find it as easy to engage with others.

### **Never completely alone**

The closing words of 2 Timothy are sad, beautiful and full of broken-hearted hope. Verse 16 is perhaps the saddest sentence in the whole letter but rather than sounding like a broken and defeated man Paul sounds victorious when he says, *"At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever."*

Paul did not have one single Christian friend alongside him at his trial. Some of Paul's friends could not stand with him because they were elsewhere, others would not, perhaps because they were fearful. Paul, like Jesus knew he was walking to his death and now here he was in his own Garden of Gethsemane, everyone had deserted him, just like Jesus and just like Jesus Paul says, *"May it not be counted against them."* Like Jesus Paul knew he was ultimately not alone, the Lord was with Him and he knew he was going to spend eternity with his Saviour. The court could decide to take his life but in the end there would be another hearing, another judgement. Paul could not escape death but the Lord had provided the ultimate rescue plan in Jesus and although death was certain he could face it because of his relationship with his faithful Friend who would rescue him and take him to home to be with him in glory.

So by all means we should seek out our friends when we are in need but when they don't turn up at our trial, or are nowhere to be seen in our time of crisis, at our hospital bed and in our time of great need, don't get angry, don't show bitterness or hold it against them. Don't wallow in self pity and question or reject the One true Friend who is always there. Friends *will* let us down, they may not mean to but they will fail us and hurt us. Many people leave church because they fall out with other Christians, they leave their Christian family and wander away from their Saviour but why on earth would you leave the best Friend you ever have because your fallible Christian friend let you down.

### **Some practical advice**

We can take some practical advice from this passage when Paul says, *"When you come be sure to bring my cloak I left with Carpus at Troas. Also bring my books and especially my papers."* Paul was cold and needed his coat and so I think we can take from this that it's important when we are lonely, down or depressed that we take care of ourselves. We keep warm, we eat well, we look after ourselves and don't let ourselves go. He wanted to read, something best done when we are on our own and something we can all do more of and enjoy and we don't always have be reading Christian books, its OK to enjoy a good fiction story, I usually have both on the go, but here Paul wanted his papers which were probably his own notes and writings and of course his bible. Up to the very end Paul wanted to read what God had revealed in order to nourish and strengthen his soul preparing him for what was ahead.

### **Make the first move**

Instead of waiting for the phone to ring, you might find that the person you want to get to know better is hoping you might ring them. Joining a Home Group is an excellent way of making friends but if that does not appeal to you there are lots of different church groups that welcome new members. We always get better acquainted when we study, pray or do outreach together and as your confidence grows it becomes easier to trust someone and share your thoughts and how you feel.

### **Don't compare with others**

It is very hard to stop comparing ourselves to others, we all do it, but it can help to be aware that things are not always what they seem from the outside. We very often only see what other people want to share about their lives and it can make us feel like we are the only ones feeling lonely. It's important to remind yourself that you don't know how people feel when they are on their own or when their social media feeds are turned off.

### **Who cares when we are alone**

Well of course God does but friends, family and people round us also care, but the fact is that if we don't tell people how we are feeling we can't always expect them to know. John Ortberg says *"People will readily acknowledge being too busy because that makes them sound important,"* he says. *"But to say 'I'm lonely' is kind of like saying 'I'm a loser,' and nobody's going to like a loser."* Sometimes it is pride and fear of what others may think that keeps us from being honest with ourselves and others but this only adds to our isolation. A lot of the times we struggle with loneliness because we keep our problems and real feelings bottled up inside but by talking about them they are put into perspective and are whittled down to size. Friends may not have solutions but just talking can help and when we know that someone cares and is praying for us it eases our sense of isolation.

The loneliest times in my life occur when I am going through a *"desert experience"* and I realise that I am missing Jesus. Desert experiences can happen for many different reasons, perhaps poor health, tiredness and overworking and results in us feeling distant from God. For me it can also happen when I get too caught up in the material world and more likely to happen when life is good and things are going well and can result in me drifting away from the Lord, and it doesn't take a crisis to bring me to my senses. It is more a case of realising that something doesn't feel right and my life feels out of kilter. That place in my heart that Jesus filled feels empty and I realise I am missing my best Friend.

### **Conclusion**

At his loneliest time Paul wanted the physical presence and comfort of his friends and the things that would make his life more comfortable and bearable and he took courage from the promises of God found in Scripture. Death was near but Paul knew that his life had eternal meaning and most of all, Paul knew that because of Jesus, he was never alone. We too can know that we will never be alone, no matter what happens in our lives because of the promises Jesus has made to us. He says in John 14:18, *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."* In Matthew 28:20 he says, *"I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."* and in Hebrews 13:5 he said, *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."* So we can know like Paul did, and say like the author of Hebrews did in 13:6, *"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me."* I hope you are confident in the knowledge that Christ will always be with you and you will always be with Christ.

## **Emmanuel Text for 2017**

*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

### **2 Chronicles 7:14**