

**EHC Week 10**  
**Loneliness**  
**Psalm 142**  
**7/24/22**

## Introduction

**MINISTRY SPOTLIGHT → COMMUNITY GROUP BASICS.**

**Psalm 142.** TWO WEEKS LEFT! **Pray.**

Today I want to talk to us about loneliness.

**Loneliness - a distressing feeling that accompanies the perception that one's relational needs are not being met by the quantity or quality of one's relationships.**

I think this one is hugely important for us to talk about, both within our church and in our society at large.

**SNL - “Man Park”.** Last fall Saturday Night Live had a skit they called “Man Park”. It was a fake commercial based around this question - “Does your boyfriend, fiancé, or husband need someone to talk to besides you?” Then → Take them to a “Man Park”. Similar to a dog park, a man park was somewhere you could bring your man to interact with other men.

And in true SNL fashion they ran the whole bit. So at one point two women are sitting on a bench and one asks the other - “Where’s your man?” And she replies “Oh he’s a little shy.” And the camera moves over to show the man hiding underneath the bench looking at the other men. Later three men are just standing in a circle all yelling “Marvel” at each other. It’s really quite the scene. Go YouTube it after this.

Now there’s some problems with the sketch for sure (one main one being that I think you could make the same exact commercial about women because friendships are just as hard for women), but as I was sitting there watching it, it just sort of dawned on me - **how true is this premise?**

**Even our society knows - we’ve got a relationship problem and we’ve got a relationship need.**

So much so that SNL, who tries to consistently offer a comedic take on what's happening in the culture at large is saying - "We don't know how to do relationships in our world. But we also know how good and necessary they are to us as humans."

**And this should not be surprising to us as followers of Jesus.**

**The teachings of Scripture show us we have a great relationship need.**

Woven into the very fabric of our being is a need for others. We are created, every single one of us, in the image of God, the "imago dei". We reflect God, who has lived for all eternity in relationship - One God, Three Persons (Father, Son, Spirit) - loving each other from before time even began.

The very first man, Adam is created, living in perfect relationship with God and yet God says it's not good that he is alone and he gives him another human - a woman named Eve. Our need for relationship is a part of the very core of who we are.

**But the Bible also tells us we have a great relationship problem.**

Because of sin, we don't live in relationship to God as we should, or in relationship to one another as we should. And this has societal effects...

We're a lonely people. We live, particularly in the postmodern secular West, in what sociologists and authors call **"A Loneliness Epidemic."**

**The stats on loneliness and isolation in our society and the effects on mental health are overwhelming:**

- Those numbers get worse the more people use social media + the younger you are.
  - Early 2022 Study - "Feel lonely on a regular or consistent basis (multiple times per week)":
    - **Boomers - 50%**
    - **Millennials - 71%**
    - **Gen Z - 79%**

**\*\*Dramatic consequences on all aspects of our health:**

- Consistent feelings of loneliness increases your risk of having high blood pressure, heart disease, and a stroke
- Loneliness can be as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day
- Loneliness increases your risk of death by 26%

In other words → **Loneliness is everywhere and it is quite literally killing us.**

### **Pastoral Word.**

I think this is particularly pertinent for our church family right now. I know that many of us are struggling with these consistent feelings of loneliness.

- We know about all the covid isolation. That's a given.
- But we also live in a city that is just tough to have friendships in - it's really a career and family driven city.
- Many of us are in life stages where it's a new challenge to build and/or maintain deep relationships:
  - Left college (all of our best friends 5 feet away w/ plenty of free time)
  - Got married
  - Kids + Career

\*\*It's tough navigating relationships as an adult - made tougher by CLT - made tougher by Covid - made almost impossible because of sin.

And so my heart today as we look together at **Psalm 142** is to encourage you. To give you some gospel driven hope for your loneliness. I think David here puts such beautiful and sorrowful words to our cries of loneliness.

So let's walk through the passage and I want to highlight **4 realities** that I think will help us as we consider what it means to move towards emotional health and maturity in the area of loneliness in our lives.

### **Psalm 142**

#### ***Backstory:***

You might notice in your Bible, just like last week, that Psalm 142 has a title. It might say like mine does **"A maskil (musical term) of David, when he was in the cave. A prayer."**

Now most scholars agree that this prayer of David comes out of his situation in 1 Samuel 22. To give you a background of what has happened - David is the anointed and chosen king of Israel, but he's not ruling yet, another guy named Saul is still king. And Saul hates David. For several reasons - David is really popular with the Israelites, David has had a ton of success in battle. The story seems to indicate that Saul has an understanding that David is supposed to be king, but Saul doesn't want to give up the throne.

So he's been trying to kill David. And now David has found himself alone, on the run, in a cave, afraid for his life.

**And that is where he voices this Psalm.**

**1 With my voice I cry out to the Lord; with my voice I plead for mercy to the Lord. 2 I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him. 3 When my spirit faints within me, you know my way! In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me.**

Beautiful example of what we talked about with "going up to God" with our emotions. David brings his complaints, his worries, his trouble before the Lord. He doesn't hide from God, he brings the full weight of his emotions.

He does that "gushing" we talked about to the Lord. God here is where I am and I need you.

**4 Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul.**

### **1. Loneliness is painful.**

David says his spirit faints within him. He looks to the right, looks to the left, what's his conclusion? → ***No one cares for my soul.***

This is what our hearts feel and our minds think when we're lonely is it not? I look to the right and to the left - there is no one who takes notice of me. ***No one who knows me, sees me, gets me, loves me, cares about me.***

This feeling of isolation. This feeling of being unknown and unloved. I have no one to call, I have no one to grab coffee with and share what's going on in my heart, I have no one who knows who I actually am or what I'm actually facing. I'm alone.

It's absolutely crushing to David. And it's absolutely crushing to us.

And I think in loneliness it's first helpful and appropriate to acknowledge → **Loneliness is painful.**

- It was painful in 2nd grade when no one wanted to play with us on the playground.
- It was painful in high school when we didn't get invited to the party.
- It was painful in college when we felt betrayed or ostracized by who we thought was our friend group.
- It's painful now in adulthood as we look around and go - "All I do is work all day. Where are my friends? Where are my people? Where is my spouse? Do I have anyone that cares for my soul?"

Loneliness hurts. And we do ourselves a disservice when we aren't willing to own that and acknowledge it. You don't have to grow hard and cold. You don't have to take a posture of "I don't need anyone, me vs the world." You're not lame or needy if you express a relational deficit and need.

**It's a good desire to want and long for relationship, for community, for someone or anyone to know and to love you.**

**But here's the 2nd reality:**

## **2. The hope for our loneliness is not to be less alone.**

David here is in the cave, and he's looking left and right, no one is there - and it's driving him to sadness and to despair and to loneliness. But his answer to loneliness is not to be less alone. You know how I know that?

Because David actually wrote two Psalms while he's in this cave. Psalm 142, but also **Psalm 57**. Same scenario. Physically alone. In the cave. No one there.

- In Psalm 142 he's crying out about his loneliness - no one cares for my soul, no one is here to be a refuge.
- But in Psalm 57 his tone is much different. He's not concerned about that.

In fact, he says this, in **Psalm 57:7-10 - My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! I will sing and make melody! Awake, my glory! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn! 9 I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations. 10 For your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.**

Same scenario - physically alone and by himself. In one he's experiencing being lonely, in the other he's at peace, he's rejoicing in God...

**SO: Being lonely is not the same thing as being alone. And being alone is not the same thing as being lonely.**

**Which means → the hope for our loneliness is not to be less alone.**

We can be tempted in loneliness to think - what I need is relationship. I'm feeling lonely because there is no one around me, and so the answer is to get more people around me. If I could just find my people, my crew, my group. If I could just find my person - some relationship or group of people who get me and love me and accept me and see all of me and it just clicks then...then...I will feel less lonely.

But the hope for our loneliness is not to simply fix our circumstances so that we are less alone. Because if that is the fix - we are setting ourselves up to fail.

- If the hope for our loneliness is more people around us, what do we do when those people leave? OR what do we do when we feel alone even when we're surrounded by others?
- If the hope for our loneliness is someone who gets us and loves us unconditionally, what do we do when we don't feel like they're loving us how we want anymore?
- If the hope for our loneliness is to be included, to be invited, to be welcomed in, what do we do when they don't invite us?

The hope for our loneliness is not to be less alone.

**New Married Couples.** I see this a lot with folks who get married. Even if they might say - "I know my spouse doesn't complete me and doesn't fix all of my problems", I still have this functional belief that "now that I'm getting married I'm never going to feel alone ever again. I've found my person, I've found my best friend.

Now is a spouse a good thing? Yes. Is marriage a good thing? Yes. But when folks get married with this functional belief of “this marriage is going to fix my loneliness”, it sets them up for a let down 6 months in when they wake up still lonely.

We need a better hope for our loneliness than simply - be less alone.

### 3. The hope for our loneliness is the ever-present God.

4 Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul. 5 I cry to you, O Lord; I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.”

Look at the language of David:

- Vs 4 - There is no one here. No one who is a refuge for me. No one who cares for my soul.
- Vs 5 - So I go to God and he is my refuge. He is my portion.

There is no one physically here, no other people who can care for me, I’m alone. **But God is here.** He will attend to my cry. He will be my portion. He will be my refuge.

God is the treasure David seeks in His loneliness. God, who always promises to be with Him. Who promises to never leave or forsake those who love Him. Who is never absent or distant from those who call on His name.

David says → My life is in literal shambles. No one is here for me. But first and foremost I need God.

### 4. God brings the *gift* of community.

Look what happens...

6 Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me! 7 Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name! The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.

David says God is his refuge, and then part of what God does is then surround him with righteous people. That’s part of God’s provision for David, as David finds his refuge in God,

**THEN** God surrounds David with others who love God and love him. That is how God provides (deals bountifully) with David...

So see the order → Community who loves God and loves you. A place where you can feel welcome, fully known and fully loved - **that is a gift from God that comes after you find your refuge and rest in Him.**

God must be God. Community must be the gift. We seek God, He gives us the gift of community.

**Those who make community their god, will never truly find it.**

Why? Because it will never live up to your god-like standards. If community is your god, think of all the things it must be for you:

- Always present and available.
- Always loving you truly and fully.
- Always forgiving you and being gracious with your shortcomings.
- Able to absolve your sin and tell you you're righteous.

In other words, if community ***is*** your god, then you'll always expect it to ***be*** like god...to be perfect.

**And no community is perfect.** So you will never truly find it because you will always think it's lacking and you will never give yourself over fully to it. AND if you think your community should be and function like god, and then it doesn't meet those standards - someone lets you down, someone annoys you, someone hurts you, someone leaves you - then what happens to your faith?

Listen, community is a good thing. We talk all the time about how you need to live life with others. Discipleship to Jesus is a group project. **CHURCH IS A FAMILY.** Get in a group. Be known. Receive and give love. All vital.

**But if you get it backwards → if community is God - it will never be good enough for you.**

God must be God. He must be enough. Then the community can fall in its rightful place - as a gift, not God. As something we receive, not worship.



German Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote a fantastic book called *Life Together* in the 1930s, says it this way - **“Christian community is like the Christian's sanctification. It is a gift of God which we cannot claim. Only God knows the real state of our fellowship, of our sanctification. What may appear weak and trifling to us may be great and glorious to God. Just as the Christian should not be constantly feeling his spiritual pulse, so, too, the Christian community has not been given to us by God for us to be constantly taking its temperature. The more thankfully we daily receive what is given to us, the more surely and steadily will fellowship increase and grow from day to day as God pleases.”**

God is the point. He must always be the point. This, us trying to be family together → That exists because of God. To make much of God.

**Another way to say it is this → We're a Jesus-centered Family. Not a family-centered family.** Jesus is our hope. We run to Him and He is what makes us family.

**So what does all this mean and what do we do?**

### Application

#### **1. Learn to be alone.**

Learning to be alone with God is essential to receiving community as a gift and not God.

There is an **“aleness” that is actually a good thing.** Remember → Loneliness and being alone are not the same thing.

**While being lonely can be detrimental to the soul, being alone is a good, and I would argue necessary, part of flourishing as a human and a disciple to Jesus.**

**Being alone is necessary to learning how to properly be with others.**

Because if I “need” you (I mean like can't go on or function without you), I can't love you. If I need you to love me, to care for me, to approve of me in order to survive, I can't love you. But if I'm at home with God - ok with being alone because I'm never alone with God - then I'm freed up to love you.

You no longer exist to fill voids or gaps in my life, I'm freed up to love you with a self-sacrificing love.

Learning to be alone is essential to learning to be in community.

After all, this was the way modeled for us by Jesus Himself right? Jesus was constantly seeking space and time to be alone. Check out **Luke 5:16 - But [Jesus] would withdraw to desolate** (lit: "lonely") **places and pray.**

This is the pattern of Jesus - withdraw and engage. Withdraw and engage. Be with others, then be alone with God.

## **2. Sacrifice, Work Hard, and Be Patient.**

(This is the one time in the sermon I really need to push you.)

Friendships are not easy. They only get harder with time, responsibilities, kids, careers. It's just not going to be easy and natural like it was for many of us in college. That's ok. It doesn't mean it's bad.

Relationships take work. Be willing to work at them. Sacrifice some things in your calendar, be willing to take on some hobbies or activities you maybe don't like all that much. Be willing to be awkward - every friendship you have started awkward, I guarantee it. This is just some of the basics of friendship making.

Just because you have to make plans a month in advance does not mean that person doesn't love you or want to be your friend or the community is bad → It means they're busy too. Stay the course. Be willing to work hard, sacrifice.

Be willing to think about and love others and not constant,y wondering if people are loving you.

And **...be patient.**

**No Roots = No Depth.** I've been in the church world since before I was born. I've been in full time ministry for almost 10 years. I've seen it time and time again - someone has a standard

(sometimes unknown, sometimes unvoiced) of how their community should look - certain demographics, certain demeanor, certain strengths, certain characteristics - and they hop and they hop and they hop and they hop (the community grass is always greener) always seeking a community they think will more benefit them, bless them, fit the puzzle piece.

And after a few years (or a few decades) of hopping they look up and they're lonely, unknown, unloved.

But the ones I've seen flourish. The ones who have that sort of relationship with Jesus I want when I'm 40, 50, 60, 70, they're the ones who said - "You know, this is an imperfect family, but it's my family."

Do these people check all my boxes? No.

Do these people love me exactly how I want all of the time? No.

Do these people look like Jesus? Sometimes. And sometimes they're sinners who hurt each other.

Do these people have all the same interests, likes, and preferences as me? No.

But I'm stuck with them and they're stuck with me. So I'm going to receive it as a gift and press into this together.

**Bonhoeffer - "The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community."**

Be patient. Embrace the community God has brought you into.

Ok, I've said enough, #3...

### **3. Rest in Christ**

**Hear me on this Christian, return to this over and over again → Everywhere you go, you go with God.**

In Christ, though alone, you are never alone.

**Dane Ortlund (Gentle and Lowly) - "Here is the promise of the Gospel and the message of the whole Bible. In Jesus Christ, we are given a friend who will always enjoy rather**

**than refuse our presence. This is a companion whose embrace of us does not strengthen or weaken depending on how clean or unclean, how attractive or how revolting, how faithful or fickle we presently are. The friendliness of his heart for us subjectively is as fixed and stable as is the declaration of his justification of us objectively.”**

Meaning - Jesus calls us friend. For all who are in Christ - He calls you friend! And that is a fixed status. One that will not change. And He is present with you, near to you. And that is fixed. It is stable. He will not leave you. He will not forsake you. You are His and He is yours forever!

And here's who we know that's true → The cross of Christ! Jesus, though without sin Himself, took our sin upon Himself. He died the death we deserved.

Jesus knows abandonment. Jesus knows betrayal. Jesus knows loneliness.

**Jesus became lonely, so we would have an eternal welcome.**

He pursued you. He called you His own. He brought you to Himself. You didn't want Him, He wanted you! You didn't pursue Him, He pursued you! You didn't have anything shiny or compelling to offer Him, and yet He loved you, and died for you to not only deal with your sins - what a wonder that is! - but to bring you into a forever relationship with Himself.

I know loneliness is painful...I know there's a whole variety of reasons why we might feel lonely...

**Listen to me → in Christ you are never truly alone. (2x)**

**(Band back up)**

This might be one of the most difficult truths of Scripture to get from our heads to our hearts. So easy to acknowledge up here - "Yep, I know. God is always with me." So much harder to actually believe.

But if we can just sit in some of these promises of Scripture together. Root our hearts in some of these truths. Memorize them, meditate on them, let them become real to you...Try to trust them and trust God in them by the power of the Spirit...

**Joshua 1:9 - Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.**

**Matthew 28:20 - ...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**

**Romans 8:38-39 - For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

This is an essential truth of the Christian life - that **everywhere we go, we go with God.**

In Christ, you are never alone...

**BIGGER INVITATION TO PRAY/BRING LONELINESS TO GOD/COMMUNION AFTER 1ST SONG**

**Pray.**

**Communion.**