

## INTRODUCTION

A good sense of humor seems to be a prerequisite for anyone who writes country songs. Here are seven actual titles of country songs:

1. Mama Get The Hammer (There's A Fly On Papa's Head)
2. I Bought the Shoes that Just Walked Out on Me
3. Meet Me In the Gravel Pit, Honey, cuz I'm a Little Boulder There
4. I'm So Miserable Without You, It's Almost Like Havin' You Here
5. You Can't Have Your Kate And Edith Too
6. If You Can't Live Without Me, Why Aren't You Dead?
7. They May Put Me in Prison, But They Can't Stop My Face From Breakin' Out

If you had been at the Grand Old Opry in Nashville on June 11, 1949, you would have heard a young singer from Alabama named Hank Williams. His music so mesmerized the crowd that evening, he was called back for a record-breaking eight encores. His haunting lyrics and his mournful voice had a way of touching the hearts of the audience. A good example of this was his song, "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry." Hear that lonesome whippoorwill / He sounds too blue to fly / The midnight train is whining low / I'm so lonesome I could cry. / I've never seen a night so long / When time goes crawling by / The moon just went behind a cloud / To hide its face and cry / The silence of a falling star / Lights up a purple sky / And as I wonder where you are / I'm so lonesome I could cry.

Have you ever felt so lonely you wanted to cry? Millions feel that way; that's why songs about being lonely are such a popular theme in country music. For instance, Eddy Arnold had a song entitled, "The Last Word in Lonesome is 'Me'" Faron Young sang a song entitled, "Underkissed and Overlonely." Waylon Jennings wrote a song called, "Lonesome On'ry and Mean." Even contemporary country singer Toby Keith recorded a song entitled, "If You're Here to See the Lonely, It's Standing Room Only."

Jesus Christ knew what it meant to be alone. On the night before He was crucified He was speaking to His disciples and said,

"I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. That makes us believe that you came from God."

Before you give the disciples credit for figuring things out, don't forget a few hours after Jesus spoke these very words, all the disciples ran away in fear and left Jesus alone. With His divine tongue in His divine cheek, Jesus replied:

"You believe at last!" Jesus answered. "But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace.

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:30-33)

Loneliness is one of the chief causes of pain and suffering in our world today. Thomas Wolfe once wrote: "Loneliness is the central and inevitable fact of human existence." Hank Williams wasn't the only person who felt so lonely he wanted to cry. If you are going to deal with the pain of loneliness, there are three important principles that you need to understand.

## **1. YOU CAN BE LONESOME—EVEN IN A CROWD**

It's possible to be surrounded by people and still be lonely. Someone has said a city is a place where thousands of people can be lonely together. There is an epidemic of loneliness in America and there are two dynamics that have created it.

### **(1) Loneliness is caused by mobilized culture**

There was a time when most Americans stayed in the same job or in the same city for most of their lives. Today, people change jobs and change addresses at a mind-boggling pace.

For instance, each year 43 million Americans move, which represents 16 percent of the population. This rate is much higher among young people. For those in their 20s 32 percent of them will move in one year, compared to only 5 percent of those over 65. For a long time there was a trend of urbanization, where Americans were moving toward the large cities, but that trend actually changed in the 1990s. Two million more people moved *away* from urban centers than migrated *to* urban areas. This restlessness and mobilization makes it difficult to establish long-term relationships.

### **(2) Loneliness is created by a depersonalized culture**

Over the past 25 years there have been amazing technological advances in America. With our pagers, cell phones, and email, you'd think loneliness would decrease, but the opposite has occurred. These gadgets have only served to depersonalize people.

For instance, do you remember when you could call someone on the telephone and actually talk to a real person? Today, you dial a number and you either get an answering machine, voice mail, or you are told to choose from an automated menu—depersonalization.

There was a time when you could drive up to a service station and chat with the attendant as he pumped your gas and cleaned your windshield, but no more. Self service gas stations have depersonalized that process.

There was a time when everyone walked into the bank and could talk to a real teller who would asked you about your family. Today there are over 400,000 ATMs in American and Americans carry over 200 million ATM cards. It's convenient, but it is another example of depersonalization.

At airline counters now, you no longer have to talk to a person face-to-face. Instead there are handy self check-in displays. Instead of speaking to a cashier in a grocery store, there are now

self-check out registers—it's only you and the computer. And computers have made shopping an online experience so you don't have to get in your car and drive to the store—just buy it on line. What's next? Self-service surgery? I saw a cartoon recently with a man sitting on a surgery table all alone with the surgical instruments laid out beside him. A sign on the bed said, "Self-service." It was supposed to be funny, but if you were watching CNN a couple of months ago, you could have observed a physician performed liposuction surgery on himself to make a point for the use of his fatty tissue for stem cell research.

There have been several science fiction movies (like "The Matrix") about how computers or robots became so human they tried to take over the human race. We don't have to worry about computers becoming like people, because the more computers we have the more like computers we are becoming. This technological depersonalization has created the perfect environment for the bacteria of human loneliness to thrive.

There are many causes of loneliness, but most people experience loneliness because someone they loved is no longer with them. You might have experienced the death of your spouse, or you might have experienced the pain of divorce. But for sure, loneliness is painful.

Hank Williams wrote another song about being jilted and left alone. The title of it was "Dear John" and the lyrics said: Well when I woke up this mornin', / There was a note upon my door, / Said don't make me no coffee Babe, / 'Cause I won't be back no more, / And that's all she wrote, Dear John, / I've sent your saddle home. / Now Jonah got along in the belly of the whale, / Daniel in the lion's den, / But I know a guy that didn't try to get along, / And he won't get a chance again, / And that's all she wrote, Dear John, / I've fetched your saddle home. / Now I went down to the bank this morning, / The cashier said with a grin, / I feel so sorry for you Hank, / But your wife has done been in, / And that's all she wrote, Dear John, / I've sent your saddle home.

It's no fun being lonely! The next thing we can learn about loneliness is

## **2. YOU CAN BE ALONE—AND NOT BE LONELY**

Just because you may be a widow or a single adult who lives alone, it doesn't necessarily mean you are lonely. That's what we learn from the words of Jesus in John 16. Jesus knew that when He was arrested that all the disciples would run and leave Him all alone. But as He said in John 16:32, "You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me." In order to overcome loneliness you must understand two important facts:

### **(1) Solitude is not loneliness**

All of us need the chance to get alone and to find solitude. If you are the kind of person who can't stand to be alone with yourself, then you may have other problems. We were made to relate to others, but there is also great value in spending time alone with God.

That's why I encourage every Christian to have a morning quiet time. This is a set time when you are still before the Lord. You read the Bible and then pray. In the hectic world we live in, the only way to maintain peace and stability is to seek this solitude of being alone with God.

The Bible says multitudes of people followed Jesus wherever He went. They were always looking for a miracle or a special treat. It was the regular habit of Jesus to seek solitude and to commune with His Father. The Bible says in Mark 1:35, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place to pray." If you want to find God's peace that's a practice that you should follow. Tomorrow morning, try getting up 30 minutes earlier and spend that time alone with God. You'll find this spiritual solitude will give you great strength and peace.

## **(2) God's presence is real and personal**

The reason you can be alone and still not be lonely is because God promised He will be with you always. I love the hymn that says, "What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer." Just as the Father was with Jesus when He was arrested, He will be with you.

When you study the history of country music, you'll find much of the early country music was recorded by a trio called the Carter Family. The group was comprised of A.P. Carter and his wife Sara. They were joined by A.P.'s sister-in-law, Maybelle Carter. Maybelle had three daughters, one of whom was June Carter, who later married Johnny Cash.

The Carter family's style of guitar playing and harmonized vocals set the pattern for decades of country music that followed. At least half of the songs the Carter Family sang were gospel songs.

One of their famous songs was called "Lonesome Valley." The song was talking about the experience of death. The lyrics said: Jesus walked this lonesome valley. / He had to walk it by Himself; / O, nobody else could walk it for Him, / He had to walk it by Himself. That's really true about Jesus. He was alone when He was arrested, but His Heavenly Father was with Him. But when Jesus died on the cross, He was even forsaken by God. When Jesus became sin for us, the Holy God had to turn His face. That's why Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have YOU forsaken me?" So indeed, Jesus walked the lonesome valley of death all by Himself.

The next verse to the song goes: We must walk this lonesome valley, / We have to walk it by ourselves; / O, nobody else can walk it for us, / We have to walk it by ourselves.

Actually that's wrong. It is true nobody else can die for us, but when it comes time for us to walk the lonesome valley of death, God promised to walk with us. The Bible says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." (Psalm 23:4)

So, even if you live alone, if you are a child of God, you don't need to fear because God has promised to be with you. God said in Hebrews 13:5, "I will NEVER leave you or forsake you."

## **3. YOU CAN CONQUER LONELINESS—BY REACHING OUT TO OTHERS**

If you aren't careful, your loneliness can make you become more isolated. If you are waiting around for someone to love you, you'll be waiting a long time. Instead try reaching out and

loving someone else. Loneliness can lead to self-centeredness which can make you bitter. Hank Williams wrote another song about loneliness entitled, "Nobody's Lonesome for Me." The words say: Everybody's lonesome for somebody else / But nobody's lonesome for me / Ev'rybody's thinkin' 'bout somebody else / But nobody thinks about me / When the time rolls around for me to lay down and die / I bet I'll have to go and hire me someone to cry. / All I need is a bride who wants a big-hearted groom / I wouldn't care if she come ridin' in on a broom. / Oh, I shined up my shoes and then I slicked down my hair / Put on my Sunday suit, but I ain't goin' nowhere. / Now I ain't had a kiss since I fell out of my crib / It looks to me like I been cheated out of my rib. / Ev'rybody's lonesome for somebody else / But nobody's lonesome for me.

God doesn't want you to experience loneliness. When He created the Garden of Eden He looked at Adam and made this pronouncement: It is not good for man to be alone. So, He saw that Adam had a spare rib, so He turned it into a Prime Rib and Adam had a companion.

Since the time of Adam, people have been looking for someone to end their loneliness. If you're lonely, you're not alone. Like Toby Keith sang, "If you're here to see the Lonely, It's Standing Room Only." His song is about a band named "The Lonely" and when they played, there was standing room only. But the double entendre of the title means there are plenty of lonely people out there.

If you focus on your own loneliness you can become bitter. There are plenty of other lonely people out there you are looking for a friend. Judy Garland was a Hollywood Star, yet she struggled with loneliness. She married five times, and died of an overdose of sleeping pills. She once wrote: "If I'm such a legend, then why am I so lonely? Let me tell you, legends are all very well if you've got somebody around who loves you."

The Bible says the best way to *have* friends is to work to *be* a friend. Proverbs 18:24 says, "A man who has friends must himself be friendly. And there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." (Proverbs 18:24 NKJV)

If you are lonely, the best place to find friendship is *not* in the bars or casinos. There are plenty of country songs about looking for love in all the wrong places. Garth Brooks even sang about all his friends in low places. I'm convinced the best place to find a cure for you loneliness is in the church of the Lord Jesus. We must make sure the church is a safe place for lonely people to find love.

Harriet Jacobson wrote a book entitled *Crowded Pews, Empty People*. It's a book about how our churches are filled with lonely people who are afraid to reach out and make friends. She writes:

"Why does a person go to church? There are many reasons. It may simply make him feel good, nicely religious and respectable, or he may be trying to fill up an emptiness that he feels, a longing to find meaning in life. But it is safe to say that whatever other motives brought him to church, down underneath consciously or unconsciously, he came to be with people, to be part of a group, to find fellowship with other human beings, to make friends.

Seated in his pew that may be full, he is surrounded by people. But as he leaves the church, no matter how the sermon or music may have impressed him, he leaves with a definite feeling of either having been made warm by a touch with his fellow worshipers or having been among many but somehow alone."

One of the greatest strengths of our church is that it is a loving, caring church. But one of the greatest weaknesses of our church is that we sometimes get so committed to our own little "holy huddle" that we neglect to reach out and welcome new people.

Dr. Karl Menninger was a renowned psychiatrist and Nobel Prize winner. He was asked once, "What should a lonely, unhappy person do?" I loved his answer. Dr. Menninger said: "Lock the door behind you, go across the street, find someone who is hurting, and help them."

In helping to seek some other lonely person, you will lose your loneliness in the process. One of the most valuable things you'll ever have is friends. But if you wait all of your life for people to befriend you, you may die lonely. Instead, you should try reaching out to others and making them your friends.

Someone said that making new friends is as easy as A-B-C. "A" stands for "affinity." Look for someone who has something in common with you. For us, being followers of Jesus, and attending Green Acres may be enough affinity. But it's even better if you find someone who enjoys some of the same hobbies you have. "B" is for "boldness." It takes courage to initiate a friendship. We're much more comfortable waiting for someone to come to us and ask us to be their friend. But if you make new friends, it requires Boldness. "C" stands for "contact." In other words, if you find someone who has some affinity you share; then when you have enough boldness, go ahead and contact them in person, or by phone, or by letter and propose you spend some time together. Making new friends is as easy as A-B-C.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, remember you can be surrounded by people and still be lonely. Yet on the other hand, you can be all alone, and not experience loneliness. The difference? It's having the positive sense that God is with you through every experience of life.

Loneliness hurts. It's not uncommon to feel so lonesome you could cry. But the key to overcoming loneliness is to seek to bring other people out of their loneliness. In so doing, you will be delivered from your loneliness. Sometimes all it takes is a word or gesture of kindness.

Jackie Robinson was the first African American to play major league baseball. Wherever he played, he was booed and jeered by the fans. He endured being the target of the "N" word even in his home stadium, Ebbets Field, where the Brooklyn Dodgers played.

During one particular game, he struck out, and then committed an infield error. As he stood there dejected at second base, the crowd booed and humiliated him. The without saying a word, shortstop Pee Wee Reese walked over stood next to Jackie Robinson. He put his arm around his

shoulders as they stood and faced the crowd. It was Pee Wee Reese's way of saying, "If you boo Jackie Robinson, you've got to boo me too." The booing stopped and the game continued. Jackie Robinson later said about that incident, "That arm around my shoulder saved my career."

There's probably someone you know who needs the same kindness and friendship from you. Who knows, it may even save their life!

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes