



Alone in the city

by Keith Glasgow

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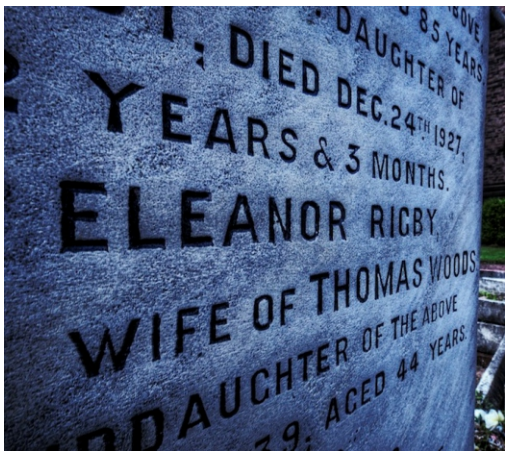
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*"Eleanor Rigby
died in the church
and was buried
along with her name,
Nobody came!
All the lonely people,
where do they all come from?
All the lonely people,
where do they all belong?"*

John Lennon

People of all ages and situations in life can experience a form of solitary confinement - a prison sentence they are forced to live with though they may have done nothing to deserve it.

Loneliness is a sad by-product of our modern, sophisticated world. In a city full of people, many feel terribly alone. In the train, on the street and at the supermarket people walk and sometimes talk, yet each one remains insulated - safe from the threat of becoming too involved with others around them.

All the lonely people, where do they all come from?

Not only senior citizens, single parents, widows... But also young adults, husbands, wives, students, and children.

A British university, in a survey among it's students, discovered the startling truth that 86% on the campus indicated loneliness as the biggest personal problem they faced.



Max Lucado, in his book "Six Hours One Friday", tells of a time when he was walking through a cemetery, and the epitaph on a tombstone caught his eye.

***Grace Luellen Smith
Sleeps, but rests not;
Loved, but was not loved;
Tried to please, but pleased not;
Died as she lived, alone.***



What are some of the causes of loneliness?



*** Social environment**

The society we live in has become increasingly violent, dishonest and self-absorbed. Ordinary people feel threatened, and insulate themselves from others who live in the same apartment block or on the same suburban street. Many are too busy to relate meaningfully with those around them. Others couldn't be bothered.

They look at their neighbours through windows, and wave at them from inside their cars as they accelerate down the street.

*** Self-made loneliness**

Without realising it, some people have built their own world around themselves. Their self-centred attitude to life has gradually divorced them from what friendships they did have. They relate to others like billiard balls bouncing off one another with only surface contact.

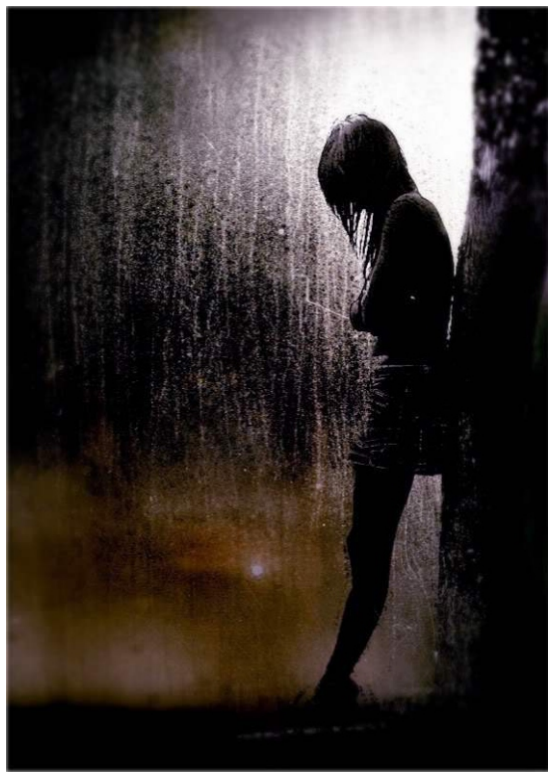
Others struggle with a low sense of self worth. Their depreciated view of themselves either causes them to retreat into their own 'safe' world, or stimulates them to be over-powering in their effort to develop new friendships, pushing others further away.



* Circumstances

Ordinary, mature, and fun loving people can be faced with the trauma of losing all those who were close to them through death or moving to a new location. Where once they were secure in their relationships with others, they find themselves alone in the city, unable to begin new friendships.

Others have been deeply scarred by the betrayal of their trust. Friendships only flower as each trusts the other enough to open up - making themselves vulnerable. If a friend betrays that trust, the hurt can develop into resentment, bitterness and self-pity. Victims can become sour, building walls of protection around themselves, and finding it hard to trust again.



* Spiritual Loneliness

Rosalie was married to a loving and faithful husband, had three beautiful daughters and lived in a nice home in the suburbs. Yet, despite her friends and family, she felt an inner, screaming thirst for deeper friendship. She had everything most people strive for, but she was still unsatisfied.

Then, when she found God personally through a personal commitment of faith in Jesus Christ, her inner 'spiritual

loneliness' was met. She entered into a personal friendship with God. His Spirit living in her brought a new and far deeper dimension of friendship that even her husband or closest friend could never give.

God designed friendship

You cannot have a friendship-relationship with your computer!

We all need a friend!

We are social creatures by our very nature. We were created by God to live in relationship with others. We are not sophisticated machines, nor are we animals. When God brought the first man and woman into existence, He created them *"in His own image ... male and female He created them."* ¹*



In the Bible's account of creation, God did not make the original man and woman at the same time. He first created the man, Adam, and then after a period of time He made the woman, Eve.

The reason is clear in the narrative. Before Eve was created, Adam was unable to find a suitable companion from among all the animals. Even the most intelligent animal is unable to converse, reason, love and share intimate relationship with a human.

Once Adam was aware of his basic need for companionship, and realised the inadequacy of animals to fill that need, God said *"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."* ²



God did not design us to be alone. His loving intention was that we should live in relationship with others, especially with the person we marry.

This basic need for companionship mirrors our spiritual nature. Not only have we been created to live in relationship with others, but we have also been made to live with God.

The true God who created all things is not a mere force or an unfeeling power which pervades the universe. He is a personal being. He made us in His own image so we could know Him and enjoy a personal relationship with Him. After Adam and Eve were created, God appeared in a human form and walked with them in the cool of the day.

* All quotes in italics are from the Bible, with references listed on page 12

They were able to enjoy His loving presence, and their need for spiritual companionship was met.

But this special relationship was soon to disappear!

What went wrong?



Adam and Eve ignored God's commands. He had warned that if they disobeyed Him they would die. They broke God's law, and immediately their relationship with Him was ruined. God still loved them, and spoke to them, but sin had forced a separation.

God is holy. He is not in any way contaminated by evil. Being perfect, pure and good, He has a holy hatred of sin. By nature He must judge and condemn all wrong.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they became the first in a long line of humanity, all existing in a state of moral separation from a holy God.

*"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*³

*"Your iniquities (sins) have separated you from your God."*⁴

Sin not only separates people from God, it drives a wedge between individuals. Human relationships are built on love and trust. Sin attacks both of these. Selfishness and greed cannot exist at the same time as genuine love. Pride and self-centredness destroy friendships.



All we need is love

On June 25, 1967 "Our World" was the first live, international, satellite television production. The first item that came into our living rooms was a video of the Beatles singing "Love, love, love ... all we need is love."

There's no argument! Everyone would agree with those sentiments. But we do not have what we need!

We see the need for love in our homes and on our streets.

We know the solution. But we do not know where to find the kind of love that will build lasting relationships and secure societies.



A casual glance through today's newspaper headlines will underline the basic problem facing every community. Wrongdoing and disorder, greed and intolerance surface again and again, despite many well intentioned efforts to bring society into a 'new age' of peace.

Lofty goals of a new society cannot be built on shaky foundations. The heart of every human is corrupt, and until that self-centred bias is changed, all efforts to reform people will not last the distance.

Self-centredness is at the core of our human situation. *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way"*⁵. Even happy marriages can be built on mutual self-interest. As long as their relationship satisfies, they stay in it. But when they no longer feel fulfilled, they break.

The Bible shows: *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind."*⁶

The solution to the world's problems begins with each individual.

Are you completely loving, good and selfless? You don't need anyone to tell you the answer!

The Bible shows that our inner nature is the source of our society's ills: *"From within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed..."*⁷



If an answer to loneliness is to be found, it must also deal with the root problem of sin.

Is there an answer?

We were created by God to enjoy a personal friendship with Him. Even though this special relationship has been broken, He still loves us, and has provided a way for our sin to be forgiven and forgotten. *"I will remember their sins no more."*⁸

God cannot merely ignore our sin, or pretend it does not exist. The only way for Him to remove the problem of sin and still remain holy is to mete out the punishment it deserves. If he punished us we would deserve death. *"For the wages of sin is death."*⁹

*"Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned."*¹⁰ His love for us is so strong and genuine that He took the punishment we deserve in order that we may go free! *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*¹¹





Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the only person who has ever lived a perfect life. He is the only one who does not deserve death and judgment. Yet He came into the world to die! He died on a cross for the sins of the whole human race. *"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."*¹² He willingly took our place, accepting upon Himself our death and our hell!

As a result, God's message is that He will freely forgive us, and restore our relationship with Him. Though our sins make us enemies of God, through Jesus Christ we become His friends. *"When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son."*¹³

What about friendship with others?

The first step to restoring relationships with others around us is to get right with God. Through the death of Christ, the barrier between people has been removed. *"You ... have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility."*¹⁴

All who become friends of God are brought into a new 'oneness' - a new community of people who learn to love each other, forgive, and serve one another. A new love for God turns into a new love for His children.

*"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well."*¹⁵

A lonely widow living in New Zealand moved to a new town and started attending a small church. She was made welcome, and soon became a real part of the church community. She said *"When I came to Kaikohe I prayed that God would give me a friend. But He gave me a church fellowship!"*





The problem of loneliness will always exist in a sinful world. But in the midst of indifference, selfishness and rejection, Jesus calls: *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me.”*¹⁶

Jesus is offering us a friendship with God that is real and satisfying. He stands at the door of your life and knocks. He asks you to invite Him in. If you do, He will enter your life by His Spirit, and become the ‘Friend inside’. He also says *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit.”*¹⁷

To begin a new relationship with God, respond to Him with a simple prayer of faith.

Read through the words in the following prayer, and if you agree, pray them to the Lord now.



Dear God,

Thank You for loving me, and wanting me to be Your friend.

I know that I have done wrong, and don't deserve Your forgiveness.

I thank You for sending Your Son to die on the cross for my sins. I believe He rose again and is alive right now.

I am willing to turn from living in a way that displeases You. Please forgive my sin and make me a member of Your special family.

I now invite the Lord Jesus to come into my life and be my Saviour and friend.

Help me to live close to You as I learn to follow the Lord Jesus.

Amen

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9. Romans 6:23
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