

## Loneliness, and Grieving the Loss of a Loved One ...

**Intro.** On October 30<sup>th</sup>, at 2:15 AM my beloved wife of 56 years breathed her last and became “*absent from the body and present with the Lord.*” I have been in the ministry for over 50 years. During that time, I have performed many funeral services and walked through the grief process with many people. But I was in for a rude awakening when it was I who had suffered the loss of my closest and most dear human friend [“The love of my life,” ... “my Best Friend,” my closest and most intimate “Soul-Mate” ... **for 56 years!**]. I was one of the “lucky” ones [PROVIDENTIALLY]. I found a partner and a friend who was a true life-time companion; we shared a deep and profound connection. Our life together was a grand adventure. ... ‘We grew up together.’ But now, my partner has died.

Pastor Al Martin said it well in the testimony he gives about the death of his wife, Marilyn, after 42 years of marriage: “... when she actually died, I instinctively knew that I was now confronting grief of a new kind and a greatly increased measure.”

Since then, for the last several months, the experience of grief has largely monopolized my mind and my life. Since I could think of little else, and because of the importance of this issue, I determined that I would preach on that subject today. For the most part, it has been difficult for me to focus or think on anything else. ... I have been given a book by Dr. David Jeremiah, titled “**Overcoming Loneliness.**” [Book of the Month] And I read a Banner of Truth article that led me to another book, by Pastor Al Martin, titled: “Grieving, Hope and Solace – When a loved one dies in Christ.” These two books, and the encouragement and support of the loved ones in my family and in the church have helped me to cope with this very difficult time in my life, ... probably the most difficult in my entire life!

The book on “Loneliness,” by Dr David Jeremiah, deals primarily with ‘the emotional aspect’ of the grief one experiences upon the death of a loved one. The other book, by Pastor Al Martin, certainly touches on the **emotional** aspect of this grief, but Pastor Martin is mainly concerned with ‘the doctrinal answer’ to the question: “What happens when a loved one dies in Christ?”

I. I will begin this message with the ‘emotional’ aspect of such grief:

> A. There are many **emotional aspects** of such grief: a. sadness, b. guilt, c. fear, d. isolation, e. **loneliness**, f. bitterness, g. insecurity, h. emptiness, i. a sense of great loss, j. abandonment, k. pain, hurt, l. Panic

B. There can be special circumstances which bring out any one or all of these emotions when a loved one dies, ... but **the most common emotion** [apart from “deep sadness,”] is “**Loneliness**,” - and ... ‘deep sadness’ is really *included in* loneliness.

**1. > “LONELINESS” DEFINITION:** NOTE – You may be surprised at some of the symptoms that characterize this loneliness. ... But I assure you, from my own, first-hand, experience, ... these are very real characteristics of the loneliness that surrounds and imprisons those who suffer from the sudden loss of a close loved one (especially someone who was a long-time companion)!

a. > a **strong** sense of loss; ... the feeling that something [someone] is missing ... There’s an “empty place” in your life.

b. > a **longing** for completeness ... [i.e. feeling “incomplete”]

c. > an empty feeling in the pit of the stomach – gnawing, growling emptiness

d. > a sharp ache [a member of GCC told me he felt like he was walking around with a knife in his chest when his wife died.]

e. > a long period of stress that wears you down, makes you sad, depressed, defeated,

unable to concentrate or focus! ...  
 f. > underlying anxiety, restlessness ... [almost like a form of “panic”!]

That whole cluster of attributes [“sense of loss”, “feeling incomplete”, “feeling of emptiness”] seems to accurately define my own experience. And, what struck me [**“Surprised” me**]; i.e. what I could really identify with in these descriptions of the loneliness of grief is that **it is an actual “pain” in the body that “hurts.”** This is something I myself have experienced. It is difficult to explain WHY you feel this pain, it is simply THERE! And, this is not only my experience. Others testify to the same thing. ... **One writer says** loneliness is “an empty feeling somewhere in the region of the diaphragm (a pain you can ‘feel’ in the physical body), a ‘craving’ to be filled ...” And our natural inclination is to seek to fill this vacuum. ... I found myself getting up in the middle of the night to eat something. ... Many with this experience have tried to fill the emptiness with drugs or alcohol or splurging on entertainment. ... The point is, when we have lost a loved one who was very close – a soul-mate – **it touches the very core of our lives!** ... After all these 50 years of ministry, and after walking with so many others in the loss of their loved ones, ... this is a completely new experience for me! I often describe it as “a kick in the gut.” [I realize there are some of you who can identify with what I am saying - i.e. you yourself may have experienced grief in this way, - I am only saying that it took me by surprise, ... and it has been a completely new experience in my life.

**Dr. David Jeremiah points out in his book ... many things can cause loneliness ...**

**2. > “Isolation”** alone can produce loneliness. Doctor David Jeremiah speaks of an elderly woman who **died living alone** in her apartment. In his book he gives this account, ...

“...an elderly woman who lived alone in a one room apartment was found dead. The medical examiner determined that she had been dead for a week, perhaps as long as two weeks. Her diary lay open on the stand beside the chair in which she died. Daily entries for the last months of her life said, ‘nobody came to see me today.’ the very last one, however, was different. It said, ‘... **still**, nobody came to see me today.’”

3. However, even when there is not such a **blatant** abandonment and isolation of an individual, **> ... loneliness can still exist in a more subtle and less conspicuous form.** ... In Dr. David Jeremiah’s book, he speaks of a personal friend who went through an extended period of months at the side of his wife, who died of Leukemia. After his wife’s death, Bill Cearbaugh wrote an account of her loneliness, and his book ... Dr. Jeremiah shares this letter, **with the permission (of course) of Bill Cearbaugh:**

“Looking back on all our situation, I especially remember when Rhonda got sicker and eventually had to go to the hospital. Unconsciously, I began becoming more and more removed from her. Often, as I went to the hospital thinking that I really wanted to serve her, I would let her try to sleep and not talk to her and be quiet. I isolated myself more and more by grabbing magazines at the lobby and reading them one after the other. Communication broke to the point where we hardly knew one another. She was getting so ill that she was finally put in a single room, by herself, and many times I would try to let her sleep by going to the lounge. I later realized that my motive probably wasn't one of servanthood. But I just wanted to be removed from the situation because of her physical state, it became more and more difficult for me, as a husband, to really love her in the way I should. By then she had lost all of her hair, she had lost several pounds in weight, and she had been in bed so long that she had a number of bed sores. Her body was very white, with almost the look of death. Her eyes were sunken in and her face looked as though she had not eaten for several days. The taste buds of her tongue were beginning to drop off. A yellow film began to develop on her teeth, and her gums were bright and highly infected. To complicate matters the contraptions that were hanging out of her body - the intravenous tubes, the vacuum tubes drawing fluid from her lungs, and the oxygen tubes going into her nose to help her breathe - all made it very difficult for me to enjoy being around her. I think now of the emotions going through her heart. Lying in bed in a dark single room, experiencing constant fever, unable to control her bowels and hearing the constant noise of the fluid being sucked from her lungs by the vacuum hose. The only interruptions were made by a nurse when she came to get the vital signs. **I later found out**

**from a friend who talked to Rhonda that Rhonda felt as though she had been left alone to die and no one really cared.** Even though every day the family was around to help her and encourage her and share with her from the Word and pray with her, she still sensed inwardly that we were withdrawing from her. **The remarkable part about this story, I think, is that though Rhonda had a deep, growing relationship with Christ, and was continually developing it until the day she died, in the midst of that relationship she still experienced loneliness in her own life as she was dying.**"

[NOTE: By the way, on a personal note, I would comment that we chose to go with **Hospice Care** with my wife Linda. This eliminates the sort of extreme isolation people experience in the hospital. But, still, there is a deep sense in the loved one that gradually, they are more and more alone.]

**A sad example of the power and danger of extreme loneliness is ...**

4. > **Ernest Hemingway**, a classic writer of the 20th century, once made this sad statement about himself: "I live in a vacuum that is as lonely as a radio tube when the batteries are dead and there's no current to plug into." ... One writer summarized the ultimate demise of Hemingway in these words: "Hemingway travelled the world as a big game hunter, bullfighter, war correspondent, and ladies' man. However, early one Sunday morning in Idaho, he grabbed his shotgun, pointed it at his head, and blew himself into eternity."

5. > **David, the Old Testament psalmist and King of Israel, experienced the pain of loneliness on more than one occasion** [...(1) the abandonment of King Saul, who became David's enemy, so that David was forced to flee into the wilderness alone; ... (2) his estrangement from God when he committed murder and adultery; (3) there were instances when David was surrounded by enemies who mocked him and ridiculed him; ... (4) in some of his psalms he speaks of one or more occasions of serious illness when he thought he might die]. As we read David's account of his loneliness and pain on these occasions, we gain further insight into the substance of loneliness.

David seems to indicate that **at the heart of his pain of loneliness was a "sense of abandonment" / and the idea that "no one cares."**

> **Psalm 142: 4 – "... no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; ... no one cares for my life."**

> **Psalm 69:19-20** – Once, when David was in a position of loneliness because everyone was against him, he said to the Lord ... "You know how I am scorned, disgraced and shamed; all my enemies are before you. Scorn has broken my heart and left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none." – [i.e. "No body cares!"]

> **Psalm 102:3-7 – "I am in distress, ... for my days vanished like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers; my heart is blighted and withered like grass. I forget to eat my food; ... because of my loud groaning I am reduced to skin and bones. I am like a desert owl; like an owl among the ruins I lie awake. I have become like a bird alone on a roof."**

There are many other examples of loneliness in the Bible – besides David - mentioned in Dr. David Jeremiah's book, each one could be the focus in a study of loneliness: Job; Moses; Hagar; Abraham; Joseph; Jacob; the Disciples of Christ – the apostle Paul in II Timothy; Christ Himself.

David Jeremiah calls to the reader's attention ...

**II. > Four Factors that enabled the prophet Jeremiah to cope with Loneliness**

Dr Jeremiah especially **focuses on the O.T. prophet, Jeremiah.** ... Jeremiah's loneliness was centered around his grief for his backslidden nation that had turned away from the Lord. His nation was ultimately defeated and taken into captivity because of their sins. ... Jeremiah was known as "the weeping prophet," and the book of "Lamentations" in the Bible reflects this. ... Dr David Jeremiah describes Jeremiah the prophet as **"... a lonely, hurting man."** In **Jer. 15:18**, Jeremiah says: "My pain is unending," and "refuses to be healed." In **Jer. 20:14-18** Jeremiah says he wanted to die, ... he was ready to quit, he was all by himself, and he wished he had never been born. In Jer. 9:2 he is longing for relief and he just wants to 'get away.' In that passage, Jeremiah

says,... *“Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travelers, so that I might leave my people and go away from them for they are all adulterers a crowd of unfaithful people.”*

In his book, Dr. Jeremiah observes **four factors that Kept the prophet Jeremiah secure in the midst of his intense loneliness**. These represent **four clues for how we can survive the pain and suffering of loneliness**:

1. > **Calling**: Jeremiah the prophet **recognized** the fact that **God** had **called** him to a special appointment in his life as a prophet of Israel. – **Jeremiah 1:4-5 ...The word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”**

a. This aspect of faith is related to one’s “world-view.”

i.e. If an individual recognizes the fact, and reality, of God’s existence, it has an enormous effect upon his/or her inward level of peace, comfort and stability [because he lives in the awareness and the security of the fact that **there exists a sovereign being who is in control of all things in the universe, Who is favorably disposed toward them [personally in the circumstances of every-day life** [Rom. 8:28 & Jer. 29:11]. This realization gives them **the assurance that there is meaning, purpose and reason behind life and all that happens**. It also gives freedom from anxiety and fear in general; ... knowing that there is a refuge, a protector, and a source of security that surrounds us, behind the circumstances of this life. **Cf. Deut. 33:27 – “The eternal (sovereign) God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”** [This is what enabled **Job**, ... who had lost everything ... ; all his loved ones, his possessions, etc.; ... even when his wife suggested to him “... *why don’t you curse God and die ...*”; instead **Job** said: “... *The LORD gives and the LORD takes away, blessed be the name of the LORD.*”

**Listen to some of the Biblical passages that assure us of this truth:**

Psalms 103:19 - ***The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.***

Isaiah 40:21-22 - ***Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.***

Isaiah 40:26 - ***Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.***

Isaiah 40:15 - ***Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.***

Isaiah 40:23 - ***He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.***

Isaiah 40:25 - ***“To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.***

Isaiah 40:10-11 - ***See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.***

Isaiah 40:28-31 - ***Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.***

\*\*\* Ephesians 1:3-6 - ***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, <sup>4</sup> just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, <sup>5</sup> having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.***

Isaiah 46:1-5 - **“Listen to me, you descendants of Jacob, all the remnant of the people of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since you were born. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you. “With whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared?”**

Isaiah 43:1-4 - **But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; ... Since you were precious in My sight, You have been honored, And I have loved you; ...Fear not, for I am with you;”**

## 2. > **Confidence in his companion ...**

Listen to Jeremiah’s words in **Jer. 20:10-11 ...**

***I hear many whispering, “Terror on every side! Denounce him! Let’s denounce him!” All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, “Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him.” But the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten.***

As David Jeremiah says in his book: “... we need ‘human’ companionship, ... **but in those moments when we are between friends, in those dark caverns of being alone, we have the Master Companion** who stays with us through it all.” [Isa. 43:1-4 & 46:1-3]. ... [The Holy Spirit that indwells Christians is called “The Paraclete,” which means “one who comes along side of.”]

Cf. Hebrews 13:5 & Matt. 28:20

## 3. > **“Commitment” that went beyond the circumstances ...**

The principle here is expressed well by Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 17:5-8 ...**

**“Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the LORD. That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. “But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”**

Dr. David Jeremiah says: **“When you put your roots down deep in trust in God, when your faith is in him, your confidence goes beyond the circumstances. ... many Christians vacillate with the circumstances ... Jeremiah says: ‘In the midst of all these problems and troubles and difficulties, my trust is in the Lord. It doesn’t matter whether it’s summer or winter or whatever. I don’t need to be anxious because I have a commitment that goes beyond these circumstances.’”**

**4. > Celebration ...Jeremiah 20:13 - Sing to the Lord! Give praise to the Lord! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.**



And so, the question arises: How could a person in Jeremiah's situation sing and praise the Lord?

The answer is: He did it **by faith!** ... [II Cor. 5:7 – “*We walk by faith, not by sight.*”]

**When the Christian appropriates the promises of God's Word, by dwelling upon them, memorizing and meditating upon them, ... it is like medicine for the soul!**

David Jeremiah says: “Doctors speak of ‘the threshold of pain,’ the level of awareness at which a person feels pain. Some people have a high threshold; others have a very low threshold. When you take an aspirin, it has no effect on your physical problem. All it does is raise your pain threshold so that you must experience more pain before you are aware of it. The aspirin makes you feel better because you don't feel how bad you feel. ...

**“Joy is like that [in the soul]. Happiness and joy are spiritual aspirin. When you are filled with the joy of the Lord, the hurts around you don't touch you so quickly.”**

Prov. 17:22 – KJV – “*A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.*”

[Dr. Jeremiah] “Many times, the joy of and praise and thanksgiving to God will dissipate the hurt you feel, as Ezra said: “*The joy of the Lord is your strength*” [Nehemiah 8:10].

**Summary:** Therefore, according to Jeremiah's example, in order to overcome sorrow, grief and loneliness, the Christian needs to have four things:

- 1) A conviction of his **calling** in the purpose of God... [Eph. 1:3-5]
- 2) Confidence in his divine **companion** [God is **always with us** & Rom. 8:28; Deut. 33:27]
- 3) A **commitment** beyond the circumstances of this life [Jer. 17:5-8] – Deep roots ...
- 4) A heart full of the deep, abiding joy of the Lord that issues forth in the **celebration** of praise [Neh. 8:10]

**III. > A Strong grasp of the “doctrinal” truth about physical death:**

A. In his book titled grieving, hope and solace, **Pastor Al Martin gives his personal testimony about his wife's death after 42 years of marriage.**

**Pastor Martin says:** ... “After being in a coma for three days on September 20, 2004 at 6:20 AM, just as the sun was rising Marilyn died. I saw and heard her expel her last breath. Although in many ways she had been taken from me incrementally during her battle with that wretched disease, **the reality of the finality of death and the radical separation it affects swept over me.** A few moments later, as I picked up her lifeless body, I found myself asking the question - what precisely has happened to Marilyn? What has she experienced, and what is she experiencing now? Immediately I knew that if I would grieve as I ought, I had to be able to answer that question out of the scriptures with absolute certainty.”

**B. Now, turning from Pastor Al Martin's testimony to my own experience**, when my own wife, my dear Linda, went to be with the Lord: ... My daughter Audrey, who was present the night Linda passed, called me into the bedroom when the end was obviously near. ... I sat on the side of the bed, holding Linda's hand and watching her breath. It was like sleep apnea. She intermittently gasped for air and then stopped breathing for 5 or 6 seconds, ... then gasped again, until finally, she breathed her last breath. It was 2:00 AM and I knew my sons would be coming over when they found out. ... I knew, Jason, especially is a big hugger, and so instinctively I thought of holding my hands over Linda's cheeks, trying to keep her warm until Jason and David arrived. Both of them were quick to arrive, but it was futile to try to keep Linda's body warm.

But the same thoughts came to my mind as Pastor Al Martin. “What just happened to Linda? What has she just experienced? And, what is she experiencing now?”

1. As Pastor Al Martin says in his book, the first thing we need to realize is that > human beings were created by God with two distinct components or entities: **bodies** and **spirits** [ **or souls**]. ... In general, we can think of the human spirit, or soul as the same thing. ...

a. > Our **bodies** consist in that part of us that is physical and touchable and visible.

b. > Our **souls** are that part of us that is non-material, invisible and truly spiritual.

cf. > Matthew 10:28 – Jesus said ... *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*

2. > **What is “death”?** ... In his book, Pastor Martin says ... > “According to the Scriptures, our physical death is nothing less than the radical separation of the two entities that compose us. In the experience of death, the body and the soul, which have been joined in one person from conception, are tragically and completely separated one from the other.”

3. Pastor Martin says > “Concerning this separation which is the essence of physical death, **two things need to be emphasized**”:

a. > **Death is unnatural!** You have probably heard it said that death is “natural,” a part of life we must accept. ... However, as Pastor Martin says: “Death is not a natural part of life. It is, rather, a violent and unnatural intrusion into human experience. ... Nowhere in the Bible is death treated as something natural or something that can easily be domesticated or treated as ‘part of life.’ No encouragement is given us in the Bible to minimize the terror and fearfulness of death, our ‘last enemy’ [I Corinthians 15: 26].

b. > **Death, for the Christian, is TEMPORARY!**

As Pastor Martin says: “All history is moving to that moment when the Lord Jesus Christ, with the entourage of the hosts of heaven, and accompanied with the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God, will return to this earth in glory and in power. At that time, the souls and bodies of all men will be reunited in the general resurrection and face the subsequent Day of Judgment.”

Jesus stated this emphatically in John 5:28-29: *“For an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who've done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”*

4. > **Scripture also teaches that in our afterlife, there is a temporary condition and a permanent condition:**

a. > “**The Intermediate State**”: This is a “temporary” state in which the redeemed exist immediately after the departure of the soul from the body in physical death.

The “spirit,” of “soul” of the believer [that part that animates and gives life to the body, departs from the body and enters the company of all the redeemed who have gone on before them, to be with the Lord:

Hebrews 12:22-23 - *But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly,<sup>23</sup> to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect ...*

The Christian was “justified by faith” in this life [Rom. 5:19, 8:1], ... he was “made righteous” in the eyes of God through the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. But in this life he was undergoing the process of progressive sanctification [sin was still present in his life and was only gradually being purged out]. Although justified and sanctified, the Christian still lives in an imperfect condition while here on earth!

But, we are told in Hebrews 12:23 that at the believer’s physical death, they enter into the company of “*the spirits of the righteous made perfect*.” From that point on, throughout eternity, they will exist as sinless beings!

b. > “**The Permanent, or eternal state**”: This condition occurs at the Second Coming of Christ, when the bodies of the believers are resurrected and made immortal and reunited to the now perfect spirit of the redeemed.

This is the final step in God’s work of glorifying believers through Christ. J.I. Packer says: “Glorification is the work of transforming power whereby God finally turns us into sinless creatures in deathless bodies.”

**Conclusion:** Our final point is that the knowledge of these biblical truths will help/enable us to grieve the loss of our loved ones in a way that is unique and distinct from the way non-believers grieve [cf. **I Thess. 4:13**].