



2Q 2019 Family Seasons Lesson 4 When Alone

by Lori Atkins

Before we start our study, we received this sad but incredibly moving email this week and I wanted to share it with you:

“My son, Reagan (24 y/o), died in a car accident on my wife's birthday, 3/22/2019. He was a 1st yr med student at the Washington State University School of Medicine and had just been accepted into the Air Force. He was on top of the world, and his trajectory was so exciting for all of us. The loss is horrifying and tragic, the pain is so heavy and unrelenting. But we have the peace that passes all understanding knowing that his knowledge of an unwavering God of love was sure and steadfast. He often talked of this God to his friends, he engaged me frequently on this topic as he knew how excited I was about this new freedom that I had been experiencing over the past few years. I have been on the journey through Dr. Jennings books, lectures, and lessons...and Reagan had caught the excitement. In his gym bag were both *Could It Be This Simple* and *the God Shaped Heart*, he was reading them both and talking about them to his friends. We thank God for this miracle of the soul that liberates and causes us to seek and love Him more. We are giving these books to those who will be attending the multiple memorial services over the next few weeks. We know that God will continue to touch lives and change hearts. Reagan's friend said of him at a recent memorial service at the medical school, ‘Reagan could love everyone because he knew how much he was loved by his God’. A true testimony of a life touched by a God of Love.

“I firmly believe that God had led me into the Truth of the Everlasting Gospel as presented by Dr. Jennings for this very moment in my life, the sudden loss of my son Reagan. My wife and I have celebrated in the glorious spirit of love and truth. Had this tragedy occurred 5 years ago, I shudder to think how I would have reacted. God is good all the time. He has prepared me, my wife, my marriage, my family (3 remaining siblings) for this! Hallelujah! Come quickly Lord Jesus. I will once again hold close my beautiful boy, presented to me by the God of Love who makes beauty of loss and grief.

Thank you so much,”
M. Lyndon Dieter, MD
(used with permission)



INTRODUCTION

So what comes to mind and how do you feel/react/respond when you think about “being alone”?

Discomfort? Bliss? Fear or panic? Freedom? Sadness? Maybe a combination of those?

You know a bunch of folks have *never* actually experienced being alone. How many of you have ever truly been alone? I was almost 40 years old before I ever really spent any time alone. Now I had these big, grandiose dreams of moving out on my own, so after my sophomore year in college I moved out of my parents’ home and to Orlando, where I rented my own apartment... got a big job at Florida Hospital. Impressive, right?

Well, hold your applause, because my mom came with me on the start of this little adventure - you know, just to make sure I got all situated and settled. I spent a total of 4 days in my own apartment...with my mom, until the night we came home to motels full of roaches so large that they stuck out both ends of the trap, and the roaches (or palmetto bugs, as they are affectionately referred to) that managed to avoid the hotels were flying around the room! That was a Friday night. The next day we went to Sabbath lunch at the home of my mom’s oldest and dearest friend. She was working at the hospital in North Carolina where I was born and brought me from the nursery so my mom could hold me for the first time, so I had known her for my entire life. She said, “oh, go get your stuff and you can stay with us until you find somewhere else to stay.” Well, needless to say, 3 years later I still lived there when I graduated from college, and did not move out until I got married soon after. It wasn’t until I got divorced in 2003 that I knew and experienced what it is like to truly spend time alone. I didn’t really like it - it was uncomfortable, it was too quiet, there were too few distractions. I experienced all the emotions I just asked you about - discomfort, peace and quiet, fear and panic, relief, sadness.

Saturday’s lesson starts with a rather horrific story about a young woman found dead in her apartment, which is a tragic enough story in itself, but the fact that she had been dead for over 10 years made it so much worse! How does that even happen in this age of constant contact and communication...it seems unimaginable, right?

What about the difference between being alone and being or feeling lonely...is there a difference? Are they mutually exclusive or can they even be juxtaposed? Can you actually feel lonelier when you are less alone (around more people)? How does that work?



And what about all this technology? We are supposed to be so much more connected, with innumerable ways to be contacted - so many that it is nearly impossible to go unplugged or off the grid. But, are we really more connected, are we really in closer communion with each other?

Is it possible for me to know everything about what's going on in your house, in your life, in your travels - at least what you decide to post and share on social media - to the point that I really feel like I know you - but not really know you or connect with you at all?

Have we traded in real, substantive companionship and connection and instead settle for this substitute of likes and emoji'd comments in our faux communities (now called "groups" or "pages")?

And are there consequences for that new norm?

Recent studies, conducted in 2018, show that there clearly are some consequences, and we are reaping them. Social science researchers define loneliness as the emotional state created when people have fewer social contacts and meaningful relationships than they would like — relationships that make them feel known and understood. Essentially, if you feel lonely, you are lonely by definition. One out of two Americans now falls into this category! How has social media and camera phones contributed to this epidemic?

In a recent study by Cigna of 20,000 people, about 47 percent of respondents reported often feeling alone or left out. Thirteen percent said there were zero people who knew them well.

The U.S. is not unique in this respect: Loneliness is reaching epidemic levels throughout the developed world.

Forty-one percent of Britons say the TV or a pet is their main source of company, and the U.K. has created a cabinet-level minister to deal with the problem of rampant loneliness.

A government study in Japan found that more than half a million people spent at least six months at home with no outside contact.

It is no accident that the US research study was performed by health insurance company, Cigna!

Former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy said, 'During my years caring for patients, the most common pathology I saw was not heart disease or diabetes, it was loneliness.'



And what health impacts does loneliness have? It makes people sick.

A 2010 study by Brigham Young University found that loneliness shortens a person's life by 15 years, about the same impact as being obese or smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Other studies have found connections between loneliness and a wide range of health problems, including increased risk for heart attacks, stroke, and cancer. Lonely people are more likely to suffer from insomnia, depression, and drug abuse. They are also more likely to suffer from more rapid cognitive decline in old age.” (<https://theweek.com/articles/815518/epidemic-loneliness>)

Any idea why loneliness is so destructive? Remember, this has nothing to do with physically being alone - I know many people who have partners and spouses and families around, but feel terribly alone.

We were designed to be in relationship - in true connection and communion with God and with others - the memory text from Genesis 2 says the “Lord saw it was not good that man should be alone...” But this week’s lesson looks at this issue of companionship, and relationship, and alone-ness during various phases of life that most of us have likely faced at one time or another...and many times not by choice.

Upon coming up out of the water, Jesus bowed in prayer on the river bank. A new and important era was opening before Him. He was now, upon a wider stage, entering on the conflict of His life. Though He was the Prince of Peace, His coming must be as the unsheathing of a sword. The kingdom He had come to establish was the opposite of that which the Jews desired. He who was the foundation of the ritual and economy of Israel would be looked upon as its enemy and destroyer. He who had proclaimed the law upon Sinai would be condemned as a transgressor. He who had come to break the power of Satan would be denounced as Beelzebub. No one upon earth had understood Him, and during His ministry He must still walk alone. Throughout His life His mother and His brothers did not comprehend His mission. Even His disciples did not understand Him. He had dwelt in eternal light, as one with God, but His life on earth must be spent in solitude. Alone He must tread the path; alone He must bear the burden. Upon Him who had laid off His glory and accepted the weakness of humanity the redemption of the world must rest. He saw and felt it all, but His purpose remained steadfast. Upon His arm depended the salvation of the fallen race, and He reached out His hand to grasp the hand of Omnipotent Love. – {DA 111.5}



SUNDAY

Companionship

We are asked what are the basic ideas or *principles* of life being discussed in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12?

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

How many of us here can testify to this concept? Even introverts, who don't mind being alone—maybe even crave it at times—we still want and need companionship and connection and community.

My precious family - both by DNA and adoption - and my dear friends - who might as well be family - have literally saved my life...more than once!

Indeed we were made for companionship, designed for fellowship with other humans. We know this by looking at the example of Adam - he walked and talked with God, and was able to draw comfort from that close relationship. But the closeness of God to Adam in Eden didn't stop the Lord from saying, “It is not good that man should be alone.” He knew that even with intimate fellowship with God in a world undamaged by sin, Adam still needed human companionship...so how much more must we?

Sadly, there are people in our church, in this class, where we work, where we live, who may have no one to turn to, no one to help them up when they fall down, and who may be longing for that companionship and connection.

You have heard of the acronym TGIF, right? (not the restaurant) But have you heard of TGIM? The quarterly quotes an unmarried man who says, “The hardest day for me is Sunday. During the week, I am surrounded by people at work, on Sabbath I see people at church. But on Sunday, I am all alone.”

TGIM - thank goodness it's Monday - is a well-known phrase among the singles crowd. Again, we cannot assume that just because there are a lot of people around, that a person cannot be lonely. Some of the loneliest peeps live in big cities and have multiple interactions with others, but still feel alone, isolated, and in need of true connection.

Keep cheerful. Do not forget that you have a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, which Christ has appointed. You are never alone. If you will listen to the voice that now speaks to you, if you



will respond without delay to the knocking at the door of your heart, “Come in, Lord Jesus, that I may sup with Thee, and Thee with me,” the heavenly Guest will enter. When this element, which is all divine, abides with you, there is peace and rest. – {AH 350.3}

MONDAY

The Unmarried Life

More precisely, The Never Married Life, and the second paragraph says, “Most people think that being married is God’s will for them” - primarily because of our memory text from Genesis 2. Do you think that most people believe that? And is it God’s will that people be married?

I believe it is God’s will that His people be healed and restored and transformed back into Christlikeness...and there may be situations - in the bounds of a healthy marriage relationship - where that can happen more effectively and efficiently, and be beneficial to both individuals and their children and their families, etc.

But there are other situations where healing and restoration can be obstructed and sabotaged by an unhealthy relationship or a dysfunctional marriage. Is it necessarily God’s will for *that* person to be married? Now don’t get me wrong, God can certainly save, heal, and restore marriages and relationships - it’s what He does - but if he has to choose between saving you (and your spouse), and saving your marriage, I believe He will choose you.

The quarterly refers to 1 Cor 7:25-34 and asks us to discuss the good reasons Paul gives for remaining unmarried (from The Remedy):

“Regarding those who are single, I have not been given any direction from the Lord, but will share my personal opinion as one who—by the Lord's mercy—has your best interest at heart and is therefore trustworthy: Because of the present crisis the church is facing, it is my opinion that it would be best for you to remain as you are. If you are married, do not seek a divorce; and if you are single—don't look for a spouse. If you do marry, you have not sinned, but marriage brings many new stressors and responsibilities (such as children); [those of you who are or have been married...does marriage bring many new stressors and responsibilities?] and given the current crisis the church is facing, I want to spare you as many problems as possible. What I want you to understand is that we have a mission, and the time to complete it is limited, so don't let your spouse distract you from fulfilling God's purpose for your life—don't get stuck in grief, but realize that when we have fulfilled our mission, Christ will return and grief will turn to joy. If you are happy in this world, then open your eyes to God's reality and become unhappy with the world; use your resources to fulfill God's mission—not indulge self—and



don't get engrossed or preoccupied with the world's entertainment, politics or agendas, because the world as we know it will soon be gone. I want you to be free from the worries, stresses and anxieties of this world, so that you can be most effective in God's cause. A single man can focus all his energies on fulfilling the Lord's work, but a married man has responsibilities to his wife and family, and his energies are divided. An unmarried woman can focus all her energies on fulfilling the Lord's work and devote her entire self to God's cause, but a married woman has responsibilities to her husband and family. I am not placing any restrictions upon you, but sharing this wisdom for your good, so that you may decide how to live your lives completely devoted to the Lord.”

All too often the story of Adam and Eve is reduced to a commentary on marriage.

The aspect of being alone contained in that story is relegated exclusively to the singleness of unmarried life...but, and get your mind around this, Eve's creation did not solve a singleness problem...it solved a human aloneness problem.

Eve was not only a wife; she was a friend, coworker, spiritual companion, and the locus of Adam's social life - as he was to hers.

These facts should be encouraging for those who are not married. Many single folks have been burdened by the divine proclamation in our memory text that “it is not good for man to be alone,” and have seen it as a virtual condemnation of single life...but this is simply not true. We can be single and yet not alone, because of the human presence of family, friends, and the people we live with, work with, and go to church with.

At all times and in all places, in all sorrows and in all afflictions, when the outlook seems dark and the future perplexing, and we feel helpless and alone, the Comforter will be sent in answer to the prayer of faith. Circumstances may separate us from every earthly friend; but no circumstance, no distance, can separate us from the heavenly Comforter. Wherever we are, wherever we may go, He is always at our right hand to support, sustain, uphold, and cheer.—
DA, 669-670

What about the urge, the impulse, the drive for self-sufficiency that comes from being single/unmarried. Is needing help from others a sign of weakness?

Is there a prize at the end of this life contest for those who asked for help the least?



How to guard against the inherent selfishness and self-focus that comes from being alone or by yourself?

TUESDAY

When A Marriage Ends

The lesson suggests that the phrase “dysfunctional family” is basically redundant since every family is, to some degree, dysfunctional...and isn't that the truth? It also mentions the degree to which the family has been attacked, and has in many ways borne the brunt of the devastating consequences of this earthly infection of fear and selfishness.

Besides death, one of the toughest things a family can experience is divorce...I'm guessing that any of you who have experienced it, like I have, can certainly confirm that to be true. In fact, in many ways it is a sort of death and produces that wide range - the entire gamut of emotions - from shock to sadness and grief, to anger, to guilt and shame, to relief, to fear and anxiety.

So many things to fear - the unknown/unfamiliar, financial worries, the potential harm/damage to children, impact on salvation...and many do also experience periods of depression and, of course, loneliness.

The verses listed in the middle of Tuesday's lesson are the main references to divorce in all of scripture (there are a couple more in Exodus and Deuteronomy...and there are parallels of the Matthew texts in Mark as well), and the lesson asks “what broad principles concerning divorce can we gather from the following verses”?

I help to facilitate a Life After Divorce study group, where we delve deeply into these 5 texts. But for this class, what is the most common response we hear when asked “how does God feel about divorce?”

Of course, God hates divorce...and why does he hate divorce? Because He hates all deviations from His perfect design.

Why did divorce get singled out so specifically? We have to remember, this whole Great Controversy is not about us...but we have a critical role to play - we are key evidence, we were designed to be Exhibit A, Exhibit B. God created humans in His image so that they could reveal truth about Himself. He designed marriage to demonstrate God-like love. Divorce is the outworking of selfishness, and it occurs when love breaks down and hearts harden. Because divorce results in pain and injury to His children, God hates divorce.



However, *what God detests even more than divorce is the destruction and eternal loss of His children.* Marriages that perpetually violate love and liberty are gross counterfeits of the benevolent principles of God's character. Such marriages masquerade as bastions of love, while misrepresenting Him and destroying both husband and wife.

The 3rd and 4th paragraph in Tuesday's lesson are quotes from The Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual, and the last sentence in paragraph 3 states,

“When a couple's marriage is in danger of breaking down, every effort should be made by the partners and those in the church or family who minister to them to bring about their reconciliation in harmony with divine principles for restoring wounded relationships.”

What divine principles might those be? The Law of Love? The Law of Liberty?

In chapter 6 of Dr. Jennings' book, *Could It Be This Simple*, regarding Shadow People, there is a section called Marriage and the Law of Liberty.

“Unfortunately, many good people suffer ignorantly within marriages that cruelly violate the laws of love and liberty, believing they are required to stay in such destructive situations. But God has never required this. His purpose for us has only and always been our healing and restoration. Therefore, He desires our separation from everything that interferes with His working in our lives...Marriage relationships that cause or allow freedom, individuality, and autonomy to erode will result in the destruction of the image of God within. And if freedom is not restored, one's fitness for heaven will be ruined. It is one of Satan's most subtle traps. When love and freedom cannot be restored within the marriage; when staying in the marriage results in individuals being so dominated and controlled that it erases their individuality and autonomy, then they have a **God-given responsibility to extricate themselves** from such destructive relationships.”

I have been telling you that God understands you...he gets you...but he is unable to identify or relate to your broken marriage, right? Wrong. He does!

Jeremiah 3:6-10 tells the story of God's divorce from the Israelites. He loved Israel, He proposed to Israel, He made vows and entered into a covenanted relationship with them. But, repeatedly in the Old Testament, God talks about the Israelites' adultery against Him...and because of her waywardness and



unfaithfulness to Him, God declares in Jeremiah 3:8 that He gave Israel a “certificate of divorce.”...and He hated it, and it broke His heart. I’m telling you, He gets it.

WEDNESDAY

Death and Loneliness

For now, this side of heaven, death is a reality for all of us - and all our relationships, including marriage, will eventually end in death. And as we know, death was never part of God’s design for life - we were created to live forever. We have become used to death, we just take it for granted - it’s inevitable. But, we still struggle to make sense of it.

I guarantee you the Dieter family is trying desperately to make sense of Reagan’s death, and many times we just can’t. Sooner or later, we all get to face the reality of our own mortality, as well as the loss of loved ones, and maybe even our closest companion or spouse.

These seasons of hurt or alone-ness are identified with and empathized with and felt by our lord and savior - surely He has borne our griefs, He feels our pain, and He understands loss and loneliness.

How do we help people in our orbits who may be suffering with the devastating pain and aloneness of losing a spouse or loved one?

With the consecrated worker for God, in whatever place he may be, the Holy Spirit abides. The words spoken to the disciples are spoken also to us. The Comforter is ours as well as theirs. The Spirit furnishes the strength that sustains striving, wrestling souls in every emergency, amidst the hatred of the world, and the realization of their own failures and mistakes. In sorrow and affliction, when the outlook seems dark and the future perplexing, and we feel helpless and alone,—these are the times when, in answer to the prayer of faith, the Holy Spirit brings comfort to the heart. (AA 51.1)

The children of God are not left alone and defenseless. Prayer moves the arm of Omnipotence. Prayer has “subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire”...If we surrender our lives to His service, we can never be placed in a position for which God has not made provision. Whatever may be our situation, we have a Guide to direct our way; whatever our perplexities, we have a sure Counselor; whatever our sorrow, bereavement, or loneliness, we have a sympathizing Friend. If in our ignorance we make missteps, Christ does not leave us. His voice, clear and distinct, is heard saying, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” Not one sincere prayer is lost. Amid the anthems of the celestial choir, God hears the cries of the weakest human being. We pour out



our heart's desire in our closets, we breathe a prayer as we walk by the way, and our words reach the throne of the Monarch of the universe. They may be inaudible to any human ear, but they cannot die away into silence, nor can they be lost through the activities of business that are going on. Nothing can drown the soul's desire. It rises above the din of the street, above the confusion of the multitude, to the heavenly courts. It is God to whom we are speaking, and our prayer is heard. – {COL 174.1}

THURSDAY

Spiritually Single

This was a new term for me. It's used to describe folks who are married, but their spouses have different beliefs/practices, so they end up coming to church alone or with just the kids, attending potluck alone, going to social activities alone, because the spouse can't or won't participate. They feel alone and maybe left out of "family" ministries, maybe they can't contribute financially as they'd like to, and they may feel spiritually like a widow or widower. How can we reach out to these folks?

Conclusion

When the Lord approached Adam and Eve after their sin, they did one of the most disappointing yet profound actions in Scripture: they "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God."

Sin created a self-damaging condition: *a desire to live alone without God*. But He is not easily deterred, and the prophetic pleas of the Hebrew prophets testify to that fact. God culminated His pursuit of lost humanity with the Incarnation of His Son Immanuel, God with us. The Incarnation echos the Eden account.

As sin is ravaging the world, God sees that it is "not good" for man to "be alone" or apart from Him; so He sends a "helper", one "corresponding to" Him. The word for "helper" in the Genesis Septuagint is the same word used in Hebrews 13:6: "The Lord is my helper."

But instead of succumbing to the temptation and drive to save self, Jesus loved completely to the point of death, so that one day we could all hear a "great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God, never to be alone again.

The Saviour would have passed through the agony of Calvary that one might be saved in His kingdom. He will never abandon one for whom He has died. Unless His followers choose to leave Him, He will hold them fast.



Through all our trials we have a never-failing Helper. He does not leave us alone to struggle with temptation, to battle with evil, and be finally crushed with burdens and sorrow. Though now He is hidden from mortal sight, the ear of faith can hear His voice saying, Fear not; I am with you. “I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore.” Revelation 1:18.

I have endured your sorrows, experienced your struggles, encountered your temptations. I know your tears; I also have wept. The griefs that lie too deep to be breathed into any human ear, I know. Think not that you are desolate and forsaken. Though your pain touch no responsive chord in any heart on earth, look unto Me, and live.