

Loneliness / God Cares

Tammy: Carol, have you ever felt lonely?

Carol: Oh yes Tammy, I remember shortly after we arrived in Africa. My babies were little and my husband was at work all day. I hardly knew anyone. And being in a new place—you can only imagine.

Tammy: That must have been hard for you.

Carol: Yes it was Tammy. When I was lonely I felt sad. It also made me feel tired and bored. I wonder, have you ever felt this way?

Tammy: Welcome to *Women of Hope*, it's good to be back here with you again isn't it Carol?

Carol: Yes it sure is! Tammy and I have become good friends, and we love being your friends too...

But you know, even if we have friends, everyone feels lonely at some time in his or her life. God has created us with a strong need to relate to other people. When that need isn't met we feel lonely... Loneliness is a deep and painful longing of the heart for companionship. I'm sure you would know how it feels sometimes.

Carol: There are many reasons why people might feel lonely. Can you think of any?... I'm sure you can...

Tammy: ...Well I can think of some...you might be missing someone who has moved away...or even someone close who's died! You feel that life will never be the same again.

Carol: Or perhaps something has happened that has changed, or damaged your relationship with someone. You may now feel a bit afraid to start another close relationship in case it happens again. So you feel lonely.

Tammy: Some people find it hard to be close to anyone...even their own family members.

Carol: Single people often feel lonely too...wishing that they had a partner... But sadly...there are times when you can feel even lonelier in an unhappy marriage, than if you were single.

Tammy: I'm sure that's very true...and sad.

Some people feel lonely because they have to be by themselves a lot...maybe they don't go out to work, and no-one is home during the day. Or maybe they live by themselves - so there is no-one else to talk to when they are home.

Carol: Mothers of young children can sometimes feel lonely because they don't have anyone to talk to about adult things...or about difficulties they might be having with the children.

Tammy: ...I remember feeling like that when my children were small. There are a lot of reasons for someone to be lonely aren't there? ...And I'm sure these are not all of them. I wonder if you might be lonely for one of these reasons? Or another reason we haven't talked about...?

Carol: You know...even people who are married...have a close family...or have great friends, can still experience loneliness. They can even feel the loneliest when they are in the company of others. Do you know what I mean?

There may be something that's different about you and what you've experienced...and you might not be able to find somebody who can understand you or the way you think about things. Even though you try, you just cannot find the right words to say just how you feel, or what you've experienced.

Tammy: People can even feel lonely because for some reason God seems to be far away from them.

Carol: Today on *Women of Hope* we're talking about how it feels to be lonely... and the many different things that might make *you* feel lonely.

A while ago we talked with my friend Stevie, who has a disability called *cerebral palsy*. She can think perfectly well - and fast, but her speech is not always clear and she moves slowly. She has a loving family, and great friends, who she can tell almost anything to. She has a very close relationship with God...she said that she tells him everything! But she still feels lonely most of the time.

Tammy: So what makes *her* feel lonely?

Carol: Stevie has told me that her disability makes her different from most of the people that she knows. It also makes her slow and tired, so she has to spend a lot of her time at home on her own, except for when she goes to college or church... or when she occasionally spends time with other people.

She told me that there are many people whose company she misses because she no longer sees them. She begins to miss those who are special to her, very shortly after she's seen them!

Also, she's single and she longs to be married, but she doesn't know if she'll ever find someone who understands her and loves her the way she is.

Even though she's a good writer, she says that she often struggles to find the right words to say just what she's thinking...or feeling.

Tammy: Wow, that must be really hard for Stevie. So...how does she cope with all these things...and especially the loneliness?

Carol: Stevie does things that she can enjoy by herself. She loves to sit outside and enjoy her back garden. Her father is a very good gardener - so she has lovely places to sit - but she's alone. She loves to listen to music...but she says that sometimes she needs to be careful about what kind of music she listens to. She can feel even lonelier after she listens to songs about things like being in love.

Tammy: I suppose different people would enjoy doing different things on their own. Stevie's lucky to have many good friendships and a loving family...

Carol: Yes she is...and she says that her loneliness is a struggle that just goes on and on...but she's learning to handle the pain. She says it *is* painful...but God promises in his word that the pain will never be too much for us to bear. He'll give us the strength we need to bear the pain.

Tammy: She talks a lot about her friendship with God doesn't she!

Carol: She does – as we said before she tells him everything and shares her pain with God.

Tammy: Now let's talk about what we should do if we just can't seem to make friends...and don't have people who are close to us?

Carol: Well...if this is how *you* feel, maybe you could think of ways that you could meet other people. See if you can find some activities where you can get to know other people. Join a class to learn about something.

And when you *do* meet someone, ask them something about themselves...where they live...what work they do...how many people in their family. And you could tell them something about yourself. But it's not a good idea to tell someone many personal things until you know that you can trust them.

Tammy: You can even ask God to help you to find some friends that you can trust...even one! Remember what we said - God created us with a strong need to have close relationships with other people. We all have that need - so maybe the person you talk to would also enjoy making a new friend.

Carol: If you know of someone who is lonely, you could make sure you talk to her the next time you see her. Or you could arrange to meet her somewhere, or visit her. ...Or invite her into your home, if that's a safe thing to do, and maybe even cook her a meal. But we must be careful not to risk our own safety to do these things.

Tammy: If you feel lonely, you can be sure that someone around you feels lonely too. We can help each other to cope with loneliness.

We're talking about loneliness here on *Women of Hope*...and we hope you don't feel lonely while we're with you! But everyone has felt it at *some* time in their life.

Carol: I've been thinking of stories in God's word, the Bible about people who might have been lonely...

Tammy: What about Paul? He was sent to prison...he must have been very lonely.

Carol: Yes...Paul – let me tell you about him...

He was a man who grew up believing in God and being taught to follow God's laws exactly. The religious leaders didn't believe that Jesus had been sent from God, so Paul was helping them to make big trouble for the followers of Jesus...he was sure he was doing the right thing. Let me tell

part of the story from God's word, the Bible, how Paul, who thought he was obeying God, had a visit from Jesus himself...

(Acts 9:1-19 NLT) Paul, whose name was then Saul, was threatening to kill the followers of Jesus in one of the nearby cities...Damascus. He set off for Damascus with his friends and was walking along the road when a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. Terrified, he fell to the ground. He heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked.

And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Saul's friends were amazed...they could hear someone's voice but couldn't see anyone! Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he discovered that he couldn't see...he was blind! So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus where for three days he didn't eat or drink...but spent his time praying.'

Let's stop and think about this... Saul must have been very puzzled by what had happened to him. I wonder how he felt when the voice said to him, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting"?

Tammy: Remember, he thought he was doing what God wanted him to do...and now – here he was – blind. It didn't seem fair!

Carol: So shall we find out what happened? ...

God spoke to a man named Ananias and told him to go to the house where Saul was staying. He said, "I have told him in a dream that you're coming." Now Ananias had heard about the terrible things Saul had done to the believers and he was afraid! But God told him that he had chosen Paul to be his voice to many people.

So...(v17) 'Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might get your sight back and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Straight away something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. After that he ate some food and soon got his strength back.'

Tammy: What a big surprise Saul must have got this time – when suddenly he could see again! Saul, also known as Paul, was completely changed after that, and instead of persecuting Jesus' followers, he *became* one... And he began to tell *everyone, everywhere* about Jesus! So now what were the authorities going to do? He had changed sides!!

Carol: That's right! ...Well of course the opposite happened...the religious leaders were so worried about this that *now* they tried to kill Paul!

Tammy: Finally they put him in prison to try to stop him spreading his new faith in Jesus. So... there was Paul in prison. What a lonely place that would be?

If you have found yourself in prison – for some reason – you'll know just how Paul felt...lonely and cut off from friends and family.

Carol: Well... here is Paul in a prison cell - all by himself. What was he going to do now? He had travelled to many places and had many adventures as he had told people about his new faith in Jesus. But he couldn't get out to talk to people now could he? So guess what he decided to do...?

Yes...he decided to write letters to some of the people he'd visited in all those different places...letters to encourage and comfort people and to share with them many things that he knew about God. We can read some of Paul's letters in other parts of the Bible.

Paul did what he could to stay connected with people. He thought about them and prayed for them all the time. He missed them so much. He wrote to his friend Timothy (2 Timothy 1:4) *'I long to see you again, for I remember your tears as we parted. And I will be filled with joy when we are together again.'* (2 Timothy 1:4).

In one of his letters, Paul wrote *'We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us – they help us learn to endure...to keep going. And endurance develops a strong character in us, and character makes our confidence grow as we look forward to our salvation.'* (Romans 5:3-4)

Tammy: So he learned to let God take care of him and comfort him in that terrible, lonely place.

Carol: Yes! That's exactly right Tammy. Paul wrote in another letter that he was thankful that God comforted him in all his troubles (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4). Do you think that God understands how loneliness feels? Was Jesus ever lonely?

Carol: Hmm...well, he was the Son of God...so when he was living on earth nobody would have truly understood him...not even his disciples, who were his closest friends. When he was arrested his friends abandoned him when he needed them the most. And then he was accused of things he hadn't done...he suffered and died on a cross...alone.

Tammy: Wow – when you say it like that – he sure would have understood what it means to be lonely.

Carol: I'm so glad that Jesus knows what we go through. He knows because he has already been through it himself. And he says he is with us and will always be with us.

Tammy: Yes, he said to his disciples (Matthew 28:20) 'be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'

Carol: That is such a wonderful promise. We can pray and talk to him about anything at any time because he is always with us. And when we feel lonely he knows how we feel and he can comfort us.

We're talking about God's wonderful promise on *Women of Hope* today - that he understands our loneliness and is always with us.

My friend Stevie told me that she can always pray and talk to God about anything, including how she feels about her loneliness – because she's not able to get out very much.

She said: 'I know that God is always listening and he *always* understands me. I sometimes ask him to help me to find the right words to express my thoughts and feelings to other people.

I think about my friends most of the time, and pray for them...this keeps them close to my heart. I often write to my friends to stay connected to them.

When I need a hug, I remember when my friends have hugged me...or I picture in my head Jesus hugging me.

I talk to Jesus a lot. This has helped me to get to know him really well. He knows what loneliness feels like because he's experienced it too. Jesus is always there to love me, to comfort me and to give me the strength that I don't have.'

Tammy: Maybe you're listening today from in prison...just as Paul was. Or perhaps you can't leave your home when you want to for some reason and it's just the same as if you're locked up.

Carol: Maybe you feel as if nobody understands you...you feel trapped in your mind. Or you feel abandoned and feel like nobody wants to talk to you.

You know...wherever you are, you can ask Jesus to be with you. He loves you and cares for you...right now...where you are. And he's ready to listen to you *whenever* you would like to talk to him.

You're listening to *Women of Hope* and we've been talking together about telling God just how we feel, *at any time* because he is *always* with us. Would you like Tammy to read a poem to you that Stevie, my friend with Cerebral Palsy, wrote about how God comforts her when she feels lonely? It's called 'He Carries Me':

Tammy:

Like a dark cloud
loneliness hovers
weighing me down
My heart aches
for conversation
understanding
a loving touch...
Unending longings

In my pain
God meets me
...always there
to listen, comfort, give me strength
He knows every thought
and longing of my heart
He loves me deeply
through loneliness
With loving arms
he carries me

Tammy: Yes. This is God's promise to all of us 'I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Joshua 1:5 NIV)

Carol: Oh, that's so wonderful. God is always ready to listen to us, help us, and comfort us. We'd like to share a letter with you from one of our listeners...

My name is Dena. I received Christ in my heart 5 years ago and I decided to write to you. I was thinking that God has a special person that I can talk with. This is you, because I already feel like you are my special friend. I stay close to my radio set every Sunday at 2.30 because I don't want to miss anything. I like so much what you are saying in your programs and your voices are so warm. My husband died 2 years ago being electrocuted and my 2 children are married and they have their own families. I live by myself now and I feel so alone. Please pray for me...

...I'm so glad we're your friends and we *will* pray for you.

Tammy: Well I hope that today if you are lonely, you have felt loved and cared for while you've been listening. We're your friends – and we want to know how we can help you...and pray for you. So please contact us and tell us what you need. You can do that by writing to...

TWRWomenofHope@twr.org. You can also visit our website and listen to more audio from our programs. Visit TWRWomenofHope.org. Or visit our Facebook page.

Carol: So friend, we look forward to our next time together. Just remember Jesus loves you, and so do we. Our time is drawing to a close today. Our prayer for you is that you have a great week filled with God's blessings.

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