

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Family Seasons

Lesson 4: When Alone

A Christian may be alone by this world's standards, but the Bible gives us ample assurance that they are always loved by God. Let's look at a few stories about people that God allowed to suffer loneliness, but He still loved them.

Cain had to live the rest of his life in lonely guilt for his jealousy and murder of his brother Able, causing his parents life-long suffering. He could have found refuge in God's love, but he refused. This is a good example of unnecessary loneliness. Even in Cain's persistent rebellion, God gave him assurance that by "putting a mark on him" people wouldn't kill him. God did this because of who He is, not because Cain was loveable.

The next example we find is Noah who spent 120 years being laughed at by almost everyone in the world. We know that ultimately, Noah's family joined him in the ark, but it is possible they took a while to get used to the patriarch's unusual ideas. God saw that the wickedness of mankind had become so great, that He was sorry He made us so He told Noah to build an ark "for yourself" (Gen 6:14). Unlike Cain, Noah chose to find solace in the promises God gave him. God would have been willing to withhold or postpone judgment if the people had chosen to repent as did Nineveh. In spite of His great love, God does honor human choices.

Abraham's walk up Mt. Moriah with Isaac must have been agonizingly lonely. He couldn't tell Sarah since the protective mother would have tried to stop him. He walked the entire hike without telling Isaac, so he must have been worrying about his son's reaction and/or resistance. Abraham had to depend on God Who had told him Isaac was the son of promise. God didn't explain why or how He was going to make that happen, but Abraham chose to believe it. God loved Abraham and had given him the most profound promises, but He still tested him. Abraham's choice allowed him to depend completely on God's loving kindness.

Hagar was sent away with her son Ishmael and is a prime example of the care God gives to a single parent. Even though she was not completely blameless for her circumstances and she was alone, God was with her.

Isaac and Rebecca's marriage starts like a "happily ever after" story, but the fight over the birthright showed that the couple was not united in their belief in God's promise that the "older shall serve the younger" (Gen 25:23). This is an Old Testament example of "spiritual loneliness" within a marriage. Neither spouse was without blame. Rebecca helped her son deceive her husband, and Isaac thought he was giving the birthright to

Esau in spite of God's promise to Rebecca. The inevitable sibling hatred required Jacob to flee and Esau to leave. The parents lost both sons and had to live the rest of their years with only themselves to blame. Yet God was faithful to His promise in spite of actions by parents and son that they didn't believe.

Jacob spent a very lonely night on his run from Esau, but God reassured with a dream showing him a ladder, and later he spent another lonely night wrestling with an angel. How gracious of God so show His presence even though Jacob's actions were what brought the trouble.

Jacob's son, Joseph spent another lonely night in a pit because of his brothers' hatred of him. We are told that, "For a time Joseph gave himself up to uncontrolled grief and terror. But, in the providence of God, even this experience was to be a blessing to him. He had learned in a few hours that which years might not otherwise have taught him ... Then his thoughts turned to his father's God ... He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord, and he prayed that the Keeper of Israel would be with him in the land of his exile." [1] This is an excellent example of God using loneliness and trials to mature our faith and dependence on Him.

This gives us a glimpse of God's attitude toward loneliness. All of us experience it, and all of us have the choice to have the same reaction to it as Joseph did. There are so many examples in the Bible of people dealing with loneliness. The list we've discussed is just taken from the book of Genesis. In all situations where faith prevailed, there had been a period of profound spiritual loneliness.

Most of the readers of this little essay have experienced spiritual loneliness because of prejudice against the gospel of Christ's righteousness unique to the 1888 message. Some have heard it and believed but have stepped back from their convictions because of pressure and the need to stand alone.

Spiritual loneliness carries the risk of bitterness in a special way. In a small pamphlet written years ago by Elder Robert Wieland, he described the essence of the 1888 message in the context of dealing with an "ornery" spouse. [2] Briefly, his message is that a mature Christian in a bad relationship (marriage or otherwise) has a choice. We can become silently bitter, or we can believe that God loves the people in our lives and wants all His children to come into unity of heart through His Spirit. We can ask God to give us the willingness to give ourselves "fully" to Him and He will give them His Holy Spirit. Thus, by denying their "right" to what we think we need to be happy, we can deal with our circumstances without becoming bitter. We are free to love God without quietly hating Him and the people in our lives.

This principle applies to any relationship, including our relationship with God. People who go through loneliness tend to blame God. We can choose to find blessing in our lonely circumstances, and the Holy Spirit will give us grace to depend on Him. What a privilege to know God will never leave us or forsake us.

—Arlene Hill

Footnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 213-214.

[2] Robert J. Wieland, *Taking the Deadlock: Or How to Live With an Ornerly Spouse*. If you would like a PDF of this essay, please respond to this e-mail with "Send Deadlock" in the header or body of the message.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

https://youtu.be/415mF_pkoFo

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