



The Season of Loneliness

The Red Cross / Coop published a report recently that says just under 20% of people in the UK report feeling lonely most days or every day. Particularly high risk groups include:

- New mums (especially those under 24)
- People with mobility problems
- People with chronic health problems
- People recently divorced or separated
- Parents whose children have left home (empty nesters)
- Retired people
- People who have gone through a bereavement recently (last 2 years)

Introduction questions:

- **Have you noticed loneliness as an issue in society? What have you seen?**
 - **What do think is driving this?**
 - **Do you know people who experience loneliness every day or most days? Do you think there are times in life when it is more prevalent?**
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Psalm 68: 1-6

Verses 1-3

- **Who are the groups referred to in this passage? In particular, who are the enemies and who are the righteous?** (Explore what the original text meant. Who was David referring to? Why did he talk about them?)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:26

- It can seem strange to see death, loneliness and isolation as enemies. How does this make sense in the wider bible story? What does this mean for our future?

Verses 4-6

- Why does David talk so much about singing and praise in verse 4?
- How can this help if you're feeling lonely? Should this affect how we seek to help others?

Verse 5

David focuses on two areas of God's character:

"Father of the fatherless"

This is the core identity of God! He loves you unconditionally with a limitless, faultless, relentless love.

"Protector of widows"

Hebrew = "judge of widows". This may seem like a strange way to describe God. However, God always wants to see justice done, and He has the power to see it through. This is great news!

God reigns supreme! He the ruler of the world and the ruler of the heavens. He controls our days and knows what will happen to us. He also has power to change things!

Of course, there's a tension here. God is both a loving father who desires our good and also a supreme, all powerful judge with the power to change things. So why am I suffering? Why am I lonely? Surely God can change it? This is a profoundly difficult question to answer. However, what we know for sure is that God *is* a loving father who wants good for me and He *is* all powerful.

Andy's personal story testifies to the fact that God allowed him to suffer for a period in his life for his eventual good.

2 Corinthians 4:17: *"For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."*

If you're feeling isolated and alone, hang in there, God has a plan!

- **Why do you think David focuses on God as father?**
 - **'Protected' can also be translated as 'Judge'. Why do you think David refers to this?**
 - **How can knowing God as our father and as all powerful help when we're suffering?**
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Verse 6

- **What does it mean for God to set lonely people in a home (or family)?**
 - **Has King's been a family to you? Share some good experiences! Is there anything that could have been done better?**
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We want to build our community stronger and stronger! Together we can fight loneliness and isolation by inviting those who don't know God into our family, helping them to know Him. This takes time and effort but the rewards are worth it! When you give someone a lift, you're not just being nice, you're fighting the evil of loneliness and isolation. When you show someone kindness and give them time, you are expanding God's kingdom where everyone matters, where everyone is important, no matter what the world thinks of them. When you invite people into your home, you are being their family, and they are doing the same for you!

Follow-up questions:

- **Have you ever thought about building community as fighting evil? Do you think it's something our society needs?**
- **What ways can we build community? Are there any specific people or groups of people you feel called to build community with?**
- **Do you know of any projects or organisations which are doing this more formally (maybe mention *Elderly Befriending* and *Safe Families for Children!*)?**
- **Pray for one another. Is there a change that you feel God is asking you to make?**

To get involved with a couple of ways we combat loneliness in our local community, please contact Jen Rawson (<mailto:jenniferrawson@safefamiliesforchildren.com>) at Safe Families for Children or Maria Sigston (mailto:maria_faith@hotmail.co.uk), who leads Elderly Befriending at King's.



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