



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Alone

God's Hope For The Hurting

Psalm 102

Mario Arindaeng | July 25, 2021

We're continuing in our series, "Help! God's Hope for the Hurting." So far we've talked about issues like anger and addiction. This morning I'll be talking about being alone.



Tom Hanks starred in the movie "Cast Away," where he played the role of Chuck Noland. He was a FedEx systems analyst, so whenever there was a major problem in some part of the world, he would fly to some FedEx depot and take care of the productivity problem. He was also a workaholic. It was Christmas day and there was a party with his family. He got a phone call about a problem over in Malaysia. So he got on a plane, but then encountered a horrific storm. It caused his plane to crash in the Pacific Ocean and he was the only survivor. He ended up on a lifeboat, which took him to an uncharted and uninhabited island.

Now he had to figure out how to survive. He had to figure out how to get food, drinkable water and shelter. He started to figure out those things, but as hard as that was, it was harder to face his loneliness. There was nobody to talk to, nobody to listen to him. He lived on that island for four years. There was a scene in the movie where he was trying to start a fire and he cut his hand badly. He got angry and threw some things on the ground, including a Wilson volleyball. After he had calmed down, he looked at that volleyball and noticed that his handprints on it kind of looked like a face. He thought, "Maybe I can make a friend." He drew a face on the Wilson volleyball, for the rest of the movie he talked to Wilson as though it was his best friend. There was no one else there.

None of us will probably find ourselves on an uncharted and uninhabited island, so we probably won't feel that kind of loneliness. But some of us do feel like we're living all alone right now. We're living in society, but we still feel alone.

I was reminded of this last week. I went to visit the administration at our local middle school. As they prepare for the upcoming school year, one of the things they were trying to figure out was lockers "What do we do about lockers and social distancing?" One of the administrators said, "We don't need to worry about the lockers now. We can worry about that later. We've just got to get these students back in school." The reason he said that is because as bad as the pandemic was this past year and the physical consequences of that, the social and emotional health of the students has really suffered. A lot of students have tough home lives, but they also felt really alone and disconnected from their peers. So he said, "We really need to get them back in school to experience community."

Loneliness is a complex struggle.

God created us for relationship with Him and for relationships with other people. As we open to Psalm 102, we're going to see that the psalmist is lonely. The context of this Psalm is most likely during the Babylonian exile. We don't know who the author is, but as we read this Psalm, you'll see that it's talking about the ruins in Jerusalem and Zion. The land had become a place of destruction, most likely due to the Babylonian conquest.

The author of this Psalm is expressing his loneliness. We see in the preface to this Psalm that he says, *“A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord.”* In verses one through three, the psalmist says, *“Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you! Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress! Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call!”* Jumping down to verse seven, he expresses his loneliness again: *“I lie awake; I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop.”*

You might feel lonely in your suffering.

There are reasons why you may feel lonely. Some of you are probably experiencing chronic physical pain. You’ve gone to the doctors, you’ve tried everything, but the pain continues. It seems as though you’re all alone and no one really understands what you’re going through. Others may have mental health issues. Maybe there has been a traumatic event in your life. Maybe you were abused.

For others, it might be your life circumstances. I’ve known students who have found a best friend in their high school or youth group, then that friend moves away. It’s not like they can go back to school the next day and make a new best friend right away. It takes time and they feel alone in their circumstance.

So you may feel completely alone in dealing with your sufferings.

You might feel lonely in your sin.

I think we’ve all experienced this. You’re driving down the road at night and see those beady eyes in the middle of the road—a possum, right? As soon as it sees your headlights, it scurries off into the dark ditch. Sometimes that’s how we are with our sin.

Maybe however we’re enjoying our sin. We’re alone with it, but we enjoy it. John 3:20 says, *“For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”* If you’re fond of your sin, maybe you’re not ready to confess and repent from it. But you need to do this.

Or maybe you’re ashamed of your sin and are afraid if you tell someone about it that you’ll be judged or condemned. You want help, but you don’t know where to get it. I love what Proverbs 28:13 says: *“Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy (NIV).”*

Some of you here today are hiding your sin. You’re alone with it and you know it. For those who continue to hide their sins, God will one day expose them. We’ve seen others—or maybe you’ve experienced it yourself—where this has happened. I love that this proverb also promises that the one who confesses and renounces their sin will find mercy. So if we take our sins to the Lord in repentance, and we get help from others whom we trust, we are told that God will then cover and protect us.

You might feel lonely in your social circles.

I know social media is a big thing today and has been for quite a while. It’s become important to see how many friends we have on Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat. You might have a thousand friends on these different platforms, but sometimes you may still feel alone. You don’t have anyone you can just call up or hang out with over the weekend.

Maybe you even feel alone in your groups of friends. Maybe you hang out with a bunch of friends, but you realize that they seem to be really connected and you’re still kind of on the outside looking in. You’re not really connected with those friends.

I was talking with a person in our church and told him I was going to be preaching on being alone. He said, *“Sometimes the loneliest place is when you’re in a group of people.”* That can be true. You can be in a group of people, but no one is talking with you or connecting with you, and they all seem like they’re having a good time engaging with one another.

Even Justin Bieber, who is a pop music star, wrote a song this past year about loneliness and how he experienced it in his life. Here’s a guy who has everything the world has to offer—money and fame—but even Justin Bieber feels lonely.

You might feel lonely in your singleness.

Singleness is not a bad thing. Paul says it’s a good thing in 1 Corinthians 7:8: *“To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am.”* Why does he say that? Because if you’re single, you have more time to devote to serving the Lord and not being distracted. Then he goes on to say in verse nine, *“But if they cannot exercise self control, they should marry. For*

it is better to marry than to burn with passion." Some of you here today may be single and you really want to meet that special somebody, but there just isn't anybody in sight. Maybe you're growing older and thinking, "The clock is ticking." You really wish God would provide that person for you.

Others of you may be divorced, thinking, "When I got married, I thought I would be married for life. I never thought I would have to go through this intense pain." I have a close friend whose wife divorced him; I can't tell you the times I've called him up to talk and realized that he was struggling with great loneliness

Or maybe you're widowed. You've lost the love of your life to death. You thought you would grow old together. Now you go home to an empty house and bedroom, all alone. You understand what it's like to feel lonely in your singleness.

Loneliness can cause various symptoms.

Loneliness can bring on various symptoms. We see some of these symptoms listed in Psalm 102:

- ³For my days pass away like smoke,
and my bones burn like a furnace.
- ⁴My heart is struck down like grass and has withered;
I forget to eat my bread.
- ⁵Because of my loud groaning
my bones cling to my flesh.
- ⁶I am like a desert owl of the wilderness,
like an owl of the waste places;
- ⁷I lie awake;
I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop.
- ⁸All the day my enemies taunt me;
those who deride me use my name for a curse.
- ⁹For I eat ashes like bread
and mingle tears with my drink,
- ¹⁰because of your indignation and anger;
for you have taken me up and thrown me down.
- ¹¹My days are like an evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.

Unhealthy life

We see from Psalm 102 that one of the symptoms of loneliness is an unhealthy life. The psalmist is dealing with depression. In verse four, he talks about how his heart is "*struck down like grass and has withered.*" He repeats that again in verse 11, saying he withers away like grass.

We also see an eating disorder in verse four. He says, "*I forget to eat my bread.*" Sometimes if you struggle with loneliness, maybe you just can't eat. Or maybe it's the other extreme, you use food to comfort you and just eat all day long.

We also see that he struggles with a sleeping disorder. In verse seven he says, "*I lie awake at night...*" I think we know what it's like when we can't sleep and lie awake at night. It's because of his loneliness that he is lying awake. Or maybe you have the other extreme, where your loneliness makes you want to sleep as much as you can so you will forget about things.

Other ways our lives can become unhealthy because we are lonely is with things like diabetes, heart disease or high blood pressure. Maybe we start to develop a mental illness or emotional problems. A person who is close to me was struggling with loneliness and turned to substance abuse with prescription drugs, just to feel better or at least numb the pain. Others may turn to alcohol. So loneliness often leads to an unhealthy life.

Unrealistic perspectives

Another symptom of loneliness is unrealistic perspectives. If you're lonely, you might start to think, "Man, there must be something wrong with me. Why don't I have close friends? Am I worthless?" Or maybe you're thinking the problem is everybody else. "Why doesn't everybody else care? They don't understand what's going on in my life."

The psalmist felt this, too. Look at verse three. He had an unrealistic perspective on his life and said, *"My days pass away like smoke."* Then in verse 11 he said, *"My days are like an evening shadow..."* They're drifting into darkness. He didn't have a realistic perspective on life.

Unfulfilled dreams

In verse six we see that the psalmist sees himself *"like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places."* He imagines he's walking in Jerusalem and sees the ruins around him. He's thinking about how great life in the city used to be when they could worship the Lord in the temple. He might have had dreams of raising his family in that environment. But now, as he looks around him, everything is in utter ruins.

I asked a lady in our church who is a widow, "What was the hardest part for you after you lost your husband?" She said, "The hardest thing for me was all those shattered dreams. I had dreams of growing old with him, but those all disappeared once he died." However, she went on to say, "Although those dreams were unfulfilled, I always knew the Lord was with me."

Loneliness can be combated using the right strategies.

So there can be hope in loneliness. God gives us hope through this Psalm and we can combat loneliness with the right strategies.

Pour out your heart to God in prayer.

The first strategy is to pour out your heart to God in prayer. Look at the beginning of this Psalm. The preface again says, *"A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord."* In verse one we see him actually doing this: *"Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you!"*

When we're struggling with something, when we're lonely or whatever the issue is, we know we're supposed to pour out our hearts to God in prayer, don't we? But we don't always do that. Why not?

I think sometimes we think, "Does God really care about me? Does He really care about my loneliness?" Or we may think, "I know God cares, but He's got so much He's responsible for. He's got to hold the universe together. There are other more important things for Him to think about." God does care about you. As we continue going through this Psalm, we see a couple reasons why we should go to God.

The first reason, in verse 12, is that this is God's sovereign will: *"But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever; you are remembered throughout all generations."* In other words, God is on His throne and is all powerful. He's not just sitting on His throne disconnected from us. He's all powerful and very personal. I love what Psalm 139:7-10 (NIV) says:

Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

So know that God is always there. You may feel alone, but He's always there. He's always wherever you're at. There is nowhere that you can escape His presence.

We also see from Psalm 102 that God is a compassionate God. Look in verses 13-17:

¹³ You will arise and have pity on Zion;
it is the time to favor her;
the appointed time has come.
¹⁴ For your servants hold her stones dear
and have pity on her dust.
¹⁵ Nations will fear the name of the LORD,
and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory.

¹⁶ For the LORD builds up Zion;
he appears in his glory;
¹⁷ he regards the prayer of the destitute
and does not despise their prayer.

We can pour out our hearts because He is all powerful, He's personal and He also is compassionate.

When I was 20 years old, I was still living in Detroit. My brother and I decided we were going to come over to Chicago. I didn't know much about Chicago, except that it was a big city, so there were probably fun things to do. We decided the way to get quickly around Chicago would be to use roller blades. We went down Michigan Avenue and tried catching light poles to stop, so we wouldn't run into cars. It was pretty fun. Then we thought, "What else can we do, since we're here in Chicago?"

I used to go to Highland Park Baptist Church in Southfield, Michigan. My senior pastor back then was Joe Stowell. Moody had the nerve to steal my senior pastor and he became president of Moody Bible Institute. We were in downtown Chicago, so we said, "Hey, why don't we go visit Dr. Stowell?" That sounded good.

I was young and naïve and didn't know that being the president of a Bible institute meant he was busy and had responsibilities. We couldn't just show up, right? But we showed up. We went to Moody, got to the front desk and asked, "Hey, where's President Stowell's office?" They told us it was up on the 14th floor. So we took the elevator up and saw the glass doors that said, "President's Office: Moody Bible Institute." We went through the doors and found his administrative assistant. She said, "Can I help you?" I said, "Yeah. I'm Mario Arindeang, and this is my brother Gino. We're from Joe Stowell's previous church in Highland Park and we just wanted to say hi."

She said, "Well, he's in a meeting right now in the board room, but let me go check for a second." She had us sit there in the lobby. I'll never forget this because it made a huge impression on me. Do you know what Dr. Stowell did? He stopped his meeting, came out into the lobby, sat down in a chair for five or ten minutes and he talked to us. "Mario and Gino, it's so good to see you. How are your mom and dad doing? I'm so glad you stopped by."

You know, in an infinitely greater way, that's what God wants to do with us. God always has time for us. He's never too busy for us. He wants to pull up a chair next to you and wants to hear about your pain, hurts and loneliness. So I want to encourage you to pour out your heart to God.

Why can we do that? Because 1 Peter 5:7 tells us to cast our cares on Jesus, because He cares for us. Think about Jesus. Nobody understands the depths of loneliness like Jesus does. First of all, He came to this earth. No one can understand what it's like to be fully God, then to come live as a human and walk on this earth in a sin-tainted world.

Then, the night before He was crucified, He was in the garden of Gethsemane. What did He say to His best friends—His disciples? "Can you guys please stay up with Me? Can you stay awake while I pray?" They all fell asleep, so He was all alone.

I think it's neat that Jesus modeled pouring out His heart to the Father there in the garden. He said, "Father, please take this cup from Me. Yet not My will, but Yours be done." The betrayer arrived with the Roman soldiers to arrest him. What did His best friends do? They deserted Him. Think of the loneliness He felt then. He understands loneliness. But it got worse than that for Jesus. After He went through all the physical pain, including the crown of thorns and the scourging whip on His back, He was crucified on a cross. All that physical pain, however, paled compared to the loneliness He felt. Think about it. Throughout eternity past, all Jesus knew was incredible intimacy with the Father and the Spirit, something you and I could never experience. Then when He went to the cross His perfect, holy, sinless body took upon our sin. Then what happened? The Father, with Whom all He had known was perfect intimacy, turned His back on His only Son Jesus. Not only that, the Father poured out His wrath on Jesus. Talk about the depths of loneliness Jesus felt. So when you feel lonely, you can pour your heart out to Jesus, because He understands more than you and I can ever grasp.

I would be remiss to assume everyone here understands what it means to pour out your heart to God. In order to do that, you first have to have a relationship with Jesus. God created us for a relationship with Him and with other people. But our relationship with Him was broken because of our sin. Too many people think, "If I'm a good person, that's going to erase my sin." That's simply not true. The Bible is very clear that sin cannot be removed by good deeds. So 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ came to this earth as

fully God and fully man. He lived a perfect life, paid for our sins on the cross, then three days later He rose from the dead. The Bible is really clear that if you repent of your sin and put your trust in Jesus alone, your sins are forgiven.

And do you know what the coolest thing is? It's that He comes to live inside you, then you're never alone. He's not just present everywhere outside you; He lives inside you. If you're here today and you've never surrendered your life to Jesus as your Savior and Lord, I want to encourage you to do that before you leave today.

Pursue deep relationships with God's people.

Not only are we to pour out our hearts to God in prayer, but we're also to pursue deep relationships with God's people. If you pursue deep relationships with God's people, it will also help cure your loneliness. Look at verse 18: *"Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord."* So you see how the people are praising the Lord, then as they're praising and focusing on the Lord, they're pursuing Him together with other people. The psalmist continues:

¹⁹ That he looked down from his holy height;
from heaven the LORD looked at the earth,
²⁰ to hear the groans of the prisoners,
to set free those who were doomed to die,
²¹ that they may declare in Zion the name of the LORD,
and in Jerusalem his praise,
²² when peoples gather together,
and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.

You know, God not only provided Jesus Christ to be the cure for our loneliness, He also provided His church, people who will point us to God and walk with us. How does that happen here at Village Bible Church? It's great that you're here on a Sunday morning as part of our worship service, but you can't form deep relationships with other people if you just come on Sunday morning. You've got to get involved in the body of Christ.

There are two ways I want to encourage you to do this: in small groups, and in serving. I love our college age small group. I'm part of that group and we meet on Sunday nights. The deep relationships that have been formed there this year are incredible. This last Sunday we met, and at the end of the group—unbeknownst to me—one of our college students, Sarah, brought her guitar. She said, "Hey, let's sing some worship songs." We ended our night worshipping the Lord together. Our college students are hanging out together all the time.

This past Friday we had a bonfire at Mary's house and now we're talking about another bonfire next week. Tonight is trivia night with 15 college students. Then for the end of this year, we're planning on a retreat. I tell you, some great community is happening in our college age small group.

In addition to all these things, my favorite thing is about this group is the texting thread we have. It's neat that as we're in this texting thread, we're sharing prayer requests. Some of them need jobs, so they'll text, "Please pray for me; I have a job interview this week." They're sharing about sick family members and we're praying about that. One of them wrote, "I have a co-worker I'm sharing the gospel with."

Something neat happened last Wednesday. Micah piped in our texting thread. "Look, I normally wouldn't ask for this, but my cat has been missing for a few days now. Could you guys pray about that? Normally my cat comes home within a day, but it's been gone for two or three days." It was neat to see my phone explode at 11:00 at night. "Hey, we'll pray for you. We'll pray that your cat comes home." Micah gets up at 5:00 to go to work and texted, "Guess what, guys? My cat was standing at the front door." Isn't that great? I tell you, celebrating little things like that promotes pursuing deeper relationships with God's people in small groups.

I also want to encourage you to pursue deep relationships with others through serving. They say that 80% of the church's ministry is done by 20% of the people. That's typical, but I think Village is a little higher. Let me say that God has given every single one of you gifts and passions to serve Him. So find a place to serve, such as on the First Impressions team in the student ministry. I'd love to have more student ministry leaders. Or in the children's ministry. Or on the worship team. There are all kinds of ministries. Some of my closest friends are the student ministry leaders I work with. Many of you know that my son went through cancer this past year. Praise the Lord, the scans show that there are no more signs of cancer. Having these leaders walk through that with

me was a great encouragement to us. They were sending me verses and prayers, spending time with me—there's nothing like that. And this wasn't just for me. I see them ministering to each other that way as they serve together in our student ministry. We really love hanging out together and wish we could have more time together.

So I want to encourage you, if you're not involved in a ministry, find a place to serve. When you start doing that, you will develop some deep relationships with God's people.

God has provided the answer for our loneliness, right? We need to pour out our hearts in prayer to Him and pursue deep relationships with His people.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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