

The Lonely Life

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[0 : 00] It's Ecclesiastes 4, 4 to 16. Let me pray for the preaching of God's word. Heavenly Father, we are a lonely people.

We are an envious people. We are a greedy people. Lord, forgive us for our many sins, and we see the effect of Hevel, of unwise living, and how much it drives us to loneliness.

But Lord, thank you that you have called us friends in Jesus. Thank you for your word that addresses us today. Keep our hearts open and soft so that we would be transformed by your word and your spirit to be more and more like you, Christ, and to build community here in this church, in this city, and in our lives.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Please rise to honor the reading of God's word. Starting from verse 4.

Then I saw all toil and all skill and work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

[1 : 24] The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

Again, I saw vanity under the sun. One person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches so that he never asks, for whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?

This also is vanity and an unhappy business. Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.

But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?

And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him. A threefold cord is not quickly broken. Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice.

[2 : 40] For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. I saw all the living who move about under the sun along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place.

There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. You may be seated. There is a dangerous health epidemic that's ravaging all of America.

And it's more dangerous than smoking 15 cigarettes or drinking six alcoholic drinks per day. It's a lot. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, the leading voice in our U.S. government for health and safety, being infected with this epidemic increases your risk by 20%, 29% of heart disease, 32% increased risk of stroke, and a whopping 50% increase in developing dementia for older patients, for older adults.

Can you guess what is ravaging our society today? Yeah. Kind of obvious, right? It's loneliness.

[4 : 14] Basically, by all measures that people have been studying, whether it's by number of hours you spend in person with another person, the number of single households, single-person households, the number of close friends that you have, every single one of these numbers are trending to show that we are an increasingly lonely society.

And it's no new fact to medical practitioners that broken heart syndrome is both an emotional and mental and physical reality.

It affects us totality, our total person. It affects us. So to us, a lonely world, the preacher of Ecclesiastes has some relevant words for us today, which is an amazing thought.

This book has been written over 2,000 years ago, and it's still relevant. It has such rich wisdom for us today. And he knows that it's not good for man to be alone.

Just as God declares in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3, Instead, we ought to flee loneliness that's striving after wind, that comes from striving after wind, and in turn, create community with those around us.

[5 : 34] That's the main point of my sermon today. And in turn, we'll see how the preacher warns us of the loneliness that's caused by envy and competition, the loneliness that's caused by greed, and finally, the loneliness that affects even those who are at the top of society.

So the preacher opens up our passage with a sobering observation to the nature of work. He says that all toil and all skill come from a man's envy of his neighbor.

Notice those repeated words, all, all toil, all skill. Where does every impressive feat of man come from then?

How have we gotten to the technological advancements of the iPhone or AI? How have we gotten man onto the moon? How have we developed COVID vaccines so quickly? It's all from competitive envy.

That's what the preacher claims. It's when we feel bitter that others are doing better. That's what fuels us to be successful. Now this is a clearly an exaggerated hyperbolic statement, right?

[6 : 49] Because after all, how could one man know the hearts of every single other person here on earth? But still, we do well to consider just how common, how ubiquitous this feeling and sin of envy is.

It reigns in every domain of our lives. It's in our workplaces, our schools, our labs, our homes, even our churches. It's literally everywhere.

Richard Phillips, he's a long time faithful pastor and his wife Sharon. They've written, the longer we serve in ministry, the more we see pretty much that everyone is envying everyone else.

No one has the circumstances that they really want. Notice how the preacher identifies the source of his envy in verse four.

It's not some, you know, abstract, far out, theoretical person of success. It's our neighbors. We are envious of our neighbors. The fodder of envy is really the closest people in our lives.

[7 : 59] Pastor Jerry Bridges in his book, *Respectable Sins*, he comments, an insurance salesman is not likely to envy a professional athlete who earns a multi-million dollar salary, but he may well envy another salesman who sells more insurance than he does.

A pastor of a small, medium-sized church is not likely to envy the mega church pastor, but he may be tempted to envy the pastor down the street whose church is growing more than his.

See, the reason we are tempted to envy in these situations is that there are enough things alike that the differences tend to strike us in the face.

So the point goes, if you are guilty of the sin of envy, which, let's say, the preacher thinks it's very likely, he knows that you could very much be envious of the people you're closest to, most similar to, your brother, your sister, your roommate, your best friend.

He drives that new car. She got into that program that I wanted. He just started dating. That's all fodder for envy in our sinful hearts.

[9 : 12] But why are we such a competitive, envious people? Why is it so common? At the heart level, even for God's adopted children, we envy because we are plagued with insecurity, aren't we not?

We're both insecure and proud. And believe it or not, those are not mutually exclusive things. Those are just two sides of the same coin. We're proud and we're insecure because we stand on the shaky ground of self-dependence.

We think it's up to us to prove our self-worth and to prove our value, to earn and achieve the love and acceptance that we really, really crave and need.

Sometimes it's been called having an orphan mentality. We think and act as if we are orphans. And we don't have a Heavenly Father who really cares and loves for us, who yearns after you.

and without the security of a steadfast, faithful love of God that's in us in Christ, we then puff up our chests, right?

[10 : 24] We puff up our chests and we compete with one another because after all, who's going to love me? How else am I going to get loved? How else am I going to be accepted?

And in the end, if you never grow out of this, you're going to have a really, really hard time being a healthy part of a community and experience true friendship.

This is what David Gibson writes in his book. Consider the old saying, any friend can share your sorrows and failures, but it takes a true friend to share your joys and successes.

Isn't this true? When we see a friend succeed and make things work, we smile and pat her on the back, but deep down we envy because she has made us feel worse about ourselves.

When our friend falls flat on his face, our sinfulness is such that we can watch him mess up and even hug him, but his failure makes us feel so much better about ourselves.

[11 : 34] If that defines our relationships today, if it defines your relationships today, you're going to struggle with always being defensive, easily hurt, suspicious of others, you're always going to feel alone, disconnected, unsupported, just like a poor orphan.

See, the most competitive of us are truly the most lonely of us. but often the world promotes envy as a motivator for incredible success because, let's face it, it is an incredible motivator.

The preacher is wise to admit that this produces all skill. Some of the most successful people in this life have been the most envious, the most brutally competitive, just a short list of some crazy successful people, Alexander the Great, Leonardo da Vinci, Oprah, Steve Jobs, Michael Jordan, all of these incredibly successful people have been widely known to use their envy, their competitive drive, to drive them to all toil, all skill.

It's unbelievable, really, if you look at it, it's unbelievable how far some people will push themselves without rest or sleep, without fun or play just to be better than the next guy.

Let's take a look at Kobe Bryant, the late, great basketball player. He was widely known to have really this relentless work ethic. He was the first and last person in and out of the gym, and while other teammates would be just waking up in the hotel at 8 a.m., he'd just be returning full of, drenched with sweat after practicing for two to three hours, putting up 1,000 shots.

[13 : 28] And throughout his career, it's well known that Kobe would use these feuds with bitter rivals, most famously with Shaq, Shaquille O'Neal, to fuel him at any costs.

It's no wonder that Kobe was one of the greatest basketball players of all time, with five NBA championships, right, made a point that one more than Shaq, 18 all-star nods, and two Olympic gold medals.

Kobe's work ethic exemplifies what has been branded as his Mamba mentality. I don't know if you guys have ever heard of that, right? This Mamba mentality, which comes from his nickname on Cord.

It's featured on motivational videos. It's in books, this idea that relentless hard work will allow you to achieve your goals above your opponents.

It's a refusal to settle for anything less than perfection, than excellence. It's a commitment to do better every single day, right?

[14 : 32] This Mamba mentality, in a lot of ways, is this world's gospel. It's this world's promise. This world that is capitalistic, competitive, everybody is just seeking to gain an upper edge against everyone else.

And so they say, if I work hard enough at something, I will achieve everything that I want. If I grind just a little bit harder, then success is just behind that next door.

But the preacher in Ecclesiastes, he splashes cold water, right, in the face of all of this. Because even if you wake up at 5 a.m.

before all your opponents, and you grind yourself to the bone, you work as hard as you theoretically could, and develop all skill and achieve all success, the reality is that time and death come for us all.

All skill in the world cannot slow down death. Even Kobe is a tragic example of this. Given all his hard work, he should have enjoyed the longest, happiest, prosperous of lives.

[15 : 48] But he would go on to die in a tragic helicopter accident at the young age of 41 with eight others, including his young 13-year-old daughter, Gianna.

Kobe probably worked harder than every single one of us, but life isn't fair in that sense. It's hevel. It's a breath.

It's a striving after wind. Why should we work then? If death comes for all, it seems pointless, then what's the point of hard work?

But the preacher doesn't agree with that logic either. It says, no, in verse five, it says that removing work and toil altogether isn't the right solution either.

it says, it's the fool who folds his hands and eats his own flesh. Following the wisdom of many proverbs, the folding of your hands, right, it's equivalent to the gruesome eating of your own knuckles.

[16 : 53] Laziness really has no place in a biblical, wise way to live. Instead, hard work is meant to be enjoyed as a gift. It's a means of grace for us to provide for ourselves and to be generous with others.

We should work hard in life to do better every single day, to pursue excellence, but when a mamba mentality turns into an orphan mentality, which it so often does, right, if we follow in the footsteps of Kobe, who works incredibly hard just because we don't trust God to provide for us, we don't trust in his steadfast love for us, we lose our way.

You see, the problem, though, is not with hard work, the problem is with us. Instead, the preacher shows us a better way in verse 6.

Again, notice the balanced wisdom of Ecclesiastes. Two folded hands, not holding anything, are lazy, self-sabotaging, self-destructive, but two hands full of toil.

It's not better either. It's striving after wind, a useless endeavor, but what's better is one open hand, full of quietness, and the other presumably full of hard work.

[18 : 25] It's a beautiful picture, really, of hard work paired with joyous contentment, and I love that picture, quietness, rest, serenity, peace, not always feeling rushed to go from place A to place B and feeling like you don't have enough time in life.

but the reality is if you do have one hand full of quietness, not full of toil, you know that you're going to fall behind the rest of your competitors and the rest of this world.

You're essentially trying to fight a boxing match with one hand tied behind your back. Of course, you're going to lose sometimes. But this is where the Christian witness begins to shine so brightly, so uniquely, is can you lose and be content?

Whoa, this is where really the Christian witness starts to shine amazingly brightly. Don Whitney, professor at Southern Seminary, he asks, can you serve your boss and others at work, helping them to succeed and be happy even when they are promoted and you are overlooked?

Can you work to make others look good without envy filling your heart? Can you minister to the needs of those whom God exalts and men honor when you yourself are neglected?

[19 : 54] Can you pray for the ministry of others when it would cast yours into the shadows? We can only do this, brothers and sisters, by fighting off gospel amnesia and remembering again and again and again that we do have a heavenly father that cares for us, that yearns for us, that delights over us, that Jesus did not leave us as orphans but we do have the full acceptance of our hearts, that our hearts yearn for in Christ alone.

We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. We are married with Christ. All things work out for our good. How rich we are in Christ.

What more could we possibly want? But we observe in our next section someone who doesn't know the richness of God's love.

He opens this new section at the beginning of verse seven. The preacher observes another example of Hevel and striving after wind in this rich lonely man.

He's in this relentless pursuit of money. Never satisfied with how many commas he sees in his net worth. Never satisfied with how many zeros he sees in his bank account.

[21 : 17] So he goes as fast and as hard as possible. Never slowing down wondering for whom am I doing this for? Why am I struggling and making myself suffer so much?

For who? You could just imagine this. Every year his house is getting bigger and bigger and bigger and every year he's getting lonelier and lonelier and lonelier.

He's adding acres of land, beds and bedrooms, seats around a dining table, all without a single soul to share these things with. This man is stupidly rich and stupidly unhappy.

notice the repeated word one that's going on throughout this next section. It repeats it over and over. This very much could have been an indefinite article like a and, a person or that, the a thing.

But one, he uses the word one to emphasize the person's loneliness. Because truly one is the loneliest number. once again, the preacher knows the better way, the way to a better life.

[22 : 40] And that life is in healthy community with others. In fact, God created us to be social and relational creatures. You see, in the garden, when God created Adam, this is remarkable.

I don't know if you, I didn't really meditate on this, but despite the fact that this was a perfect, sinless relationship that Adam had with God before the fall, God still calls him alone.

He had a perfect relationship with God, but God still calls him alone. And he creates Eve from his rib and gives her to him to enjoy the blessing of children through her.

So it's true that our need for others, our need for community is not a defect of sin, but it's part of our intended design. So considering this, it's absolutely tragic that this man pursues riches and pleasures and stuff alone.

He's less than human. That's not his intended design. And he doesn't have son or brother, family or friends to enjoy any of these things with.

[24 : 01] And those are two sources of community that I want to talk briefly about today. So first, family. It's clear that the Bible is pro-marriage, pro-children through and through.

Marriage and sex and procreation, they've always been God's ideas and God's gifts to man. But the world continues to purport that the traditional nuclear family is regressive.

It's backwards. People don't see the point of marriage anymore other than tax breaks. They claim that children only get in the way of achieving your dreams.

They're too much money. They're too much time. I can't have children. And so our world prefers to raise a cute corgi puppy instead of raising children.

A recent USA Today and One Poll survey found that 40% of the people that they surveyed, 40% of dog owners found that caring for dogs are easier, cheaper, and as a result, they chose not to have children.

[25 : 13] This is not to offend any dog owners today, but that's backwards. backwards. It's backwards when we consider what God has provided for us as joy and human flourishing as a killjoy that drains our personal resources that we rather use for our own agendas, our own goals.

And I know that I'm yet to fully experience parenthood, but from what I hear from more experienced parents here at church, while children do require financial investment, don't get me wrong, but kids don't have to be break-bankingly expensive.

You don't have to plunge yourself into debt. That's not unless you fall into the travel teen trap, where you make sure that your kid has every possible resource to be Beethoven and Elon Musk and Simone Biles all together in one super-mega child.

This world thinks that good parenting means that he could play world-class violin and compete on math team and play on the Olympic development travel soccer team. Instead, good, faithful parenting, according to biblical wisdom, is to teach them to fear God, and that's free.

Even if kids cost money, this is the better way to live. That's what the preacher is saying. It is far better to be a little bit poorer with children than to be rich alone.

[26 : 49] It's far better to focus and invest in your marriage than it is to fast-track your promotion at work. After all, it's the fool again who lives alone in a mansion that's too big for him.

So let's shape the way that we prioritize our family, view the blessing of family in light of scripture. Do you need to reorient your value systems and your priorities to match what scripture teaches?

Is it time you let go of your idolized career and salary to experience a far better life in pursuing marriage and children? But that's not the only source of community that we need.

We know that marriage and family isn't everything. In fact, Jesus himself was marriage-less, childless, and he lived a perfect life. We know that getting married is a great blessing from God, but because of our marriage with Christ, it's not a must for God's people.

In fact, Paul actually says that it's better, it's better to remain single and to be fully devoted to the Lord than to have divided attentions from marriage and children.

[28 : 06] And so this next passage in verses 9 to 12 is one of the most famous passages in Ecclesiastes, and it's for good reason, and it's often read in wedding ceremonies.

In fact, I think Sean is prepping a sermon right now on this very passage to preach at a wedding. And marriage is a great application for this passage, highlighting the benefits of two becoming one, a husband-wife becoming one.

But understand that when we read a passage like this, when two are better than one, that marriage need not be the only application.

Another great application for us to think and wrestle with is our friendships. Verses 9 to 12 sets a scene of going on a long journey in the ancient Near East.

You know, back then these weren't happy-go-lucky, easy road trips. They were treacherous, dangerous journeys. Going on your own could very much be your own death sentence.

[29 : 11] Traveling in the dark without flashlights, very easy to fall into your pit, to your peril. Israel would have been cold at night, so men would travel together and lay their garments over their bodies so that they'd be able to keep warm.

These journeys would also be riddled with bandits and thieves that would beat you up to a bloody pulp and steal every last thing on your body, just like it happened to the man in the peril of the good Samaritan.

So clearly, two is better than one. And even better, a three-fold cord is not quickly broken. If you don't know this already, our very own Joshua Henderson had just recently returned from a crazy long, arduous, literally cross-country pilgrimage as he and two friends, they hiked over 3,000 miles over 115 days.

That's just insane. I hope that none of you guys ever do this ever again. I hope you never do this ever again. They started from the Mexican border in New Mexico, and they went all the way up to the Canadian border in Montana.

That, again, insane. And much to my horror and dismay, Josh, you know, you told me that all three of you had near-death experiences on this trip.

[30 : 43] All right, this is from Joshua. For Daniel, it was during a river crossing where he nearly drowned. Just why? Why would you do this? For Sung, it was a ridgeline glassade where he triggered an avalanche, of course.

For me, it was attempting an off-trail descent in Montana where I slid, almost slid off, a 300-foot cliff that was out of sight when I began my slide. One similarity across all of these moments, we were on our own when they happened.

But when they were together, they watched their backs. They supported each other, encouraged one another, helped each other when others needed help. And through this, Josh really has lived out that a three-fold cord is not quickly broken.

We, like the preacher, know the great value of having deep friendships, right? Life is as treacherous as these journeys through the middle of the night.

And some seasons are especially harder than others. Maybe you're in that really, really hard season. And what we need in those moments, more than anything, for faithful friends to come around us, to pray with us, to lift up our heads.

[32 : 08] Jesus himself invested in friendship in his life, particularly with the inner three disciples, with Peter, John, and James. When Paul sensed that he was at the end of his life as he was writing the letter 2 Timothy, he wrote to his friends when he was weary, cold, discouraged, friends like Timothy, Priscilla, and Aquila, Luke, and Mark, to come and comfort him.

He writes twice at the end of his letter, do your best to come to me soon. Do your best to come to me soon. Paul knew that he needed people in his life to come around him at the last hour of his death.

We know the value, but some, some of us, we struggle with maintaining or keeping or making deep friendships in this season of life.

It feels like it's harder and harder to keep and maintain deep friends, is it not? You know, we get busy with other things, with good things, but friendship often hits the last of our priorities.

Or we get stuck. We get stuck on what an ideal friendship, what an ideal community would look like. Like Christine Hoover in her book, *Messy, Beautiful Friendship*, she confesses, we want sugary, sweet, easy cum community where we flit into one another's homes without knocking, laugh deep into the nights, know one another, and are known without effort, and never exchange a cross or a challenging word.

[33 : 47] We typically envision dinner parties and game nights, vacationing together and talking on the phone every single day. Now, you guys know me as an introvert. I really hope that you don't call me every single day, but I too idolize and idolize friendship to be this easy.

But Dietrich Bonhoeffer has this great quote in his book *Life Together*. I'm going to read it twice so that we can make sure we get it. The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community.

Again, the person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community. So in efforts not to love our idealized versions of friendships, but the actual people in front of us, I exhort you, if you are here and you're not a member of a Bible-preaching church, take time to consider becoming a member of a church.

Go to the membership class that we just advertised so that you can make your vow before God and his people, that you will commit yourself to this kind of deep friendship. If you are a member of this church and you feel like you don't have these kinds of deep friendships, friend, resist the easy temptation that comes to blame other people.

It's because those people are so weird. Those people are so hard to love. It's because they keep on leaving. Just like you can't choose your own biological family members, you can't choose your spiritual family members.

[35 : 39] Friends resist the temptation of waiting for that perfect friend, that one sugary, sweet, easy-cum friendship, because it might not come.

And sometimes just as those friendships do come, they instantly dissolve like cotton candy on your tongue. Instead, we ought to come to church and to our friendships with an attitude, a desire to serve and not to be served.

Instead of pointing fingers at others and their shortcomings as friends, try being the friend that you want to have. Be countercultural and be faithful as friends because this world, they drop people at the drop of a dime the second you say something mean, the second you say something offensive.

But commit yourself. Be faithful friends. And over time, you will see the power of a three-fold cord that is not quickly broken.

Just as Paul depended on his friends at the end of his life, whether you are single, you're married, you have kids, you don't have kids, we all need friends to fight with us so that we can finish this race and keep the faith.

[36 : 56] That's the power of community. Part of the advantages of community is found in taking advice from those around us, as we'll see in our final section in this morning, in verses 13 to 16.

See, these verses can be kind of hard to understand. I don't know if you were confused when we first read it because of the ambiguous personal pronouns, right? Like, who is he in verse 14 that went from prison to the throne?

And who is the he who led all these people in verse 16? What majority of the commentators think, and I agree with them, is that in this scene there are only two characters, two kings, both introduced in verse 13.

You have the old and foolish king who no longer knows how to take advice, but then you have the wise and poor youth. It's this youth, then, who was born into the poor house that ascends on his meteoric rise to the White House.

So when you compare these two kings, the preacher lays out clearly the better way to live. This is the third better way to live. It's to listen to the advice of others.

[38 : 10] It's better to be poor and teachable than it is to be a rich, stubborn fool. For it is the fool that needs to touch a burning stove rather than to listen to others to learn that it's hot.

So if you're going through a major decision in life, the preacher is beckoning you, I know a better way. Listen to the wise people around you.

We would do well to heed the advice of others and resist the temptation to walk to the beat of our own drum. Don't let pride blind you to underestimate your own ignorance.

Let's fight the natural urge to already predetermine, pre-select what kind of advice you choose to listen to and what advice you choose to reject. Another way to look at it is we must age well.

Often we simply assume that aging comes naturally with wisdom, right? But clearly the preacher thinks otherwise. Instead, age can come with an ever so subtle but dangerous and deadly hardening of our hearts year after year.

[39 : 31] And the king allowed this to happen. He let his age harden his heart and mind. Look at the text. Look how it says he no longer. He used to know.

He used to be able to take advice from others. But he aged poorly. Ecclesiastes challenges us to make it our goal to be humble, teachable old men and women.

If you are young in your career, maybe you don't have that much sway in your companies. You don't have as much sway as the seasoned directors or the professors that you report to.

It's easier to listen, to be humble, because that's what you're expected to do. That's what you have to do. But one day, a lot of you guys are young, but one day you very well might be a director.

With associates to manage. You might be a PI with students to lead. You might be a grandparent with grandkids to mentor. Will you still be able to listen to advice then?

[40 : 37] We must prepare for the people that you want to be 30 years, 50 years down the road, because it's the seeds that are planted today that bear fruit decades later.

And even though this is the better way to live, the preacher observes a tragic ending for this young, wiser king.

Despite his rags to riches story, despite his wisdom in being able to listen to others, verses 15 to 16 teach us that even him, even this wise youth over time loses popularity and power until he is all alone with no one to delight in him.

For what reason, right? He had a, he must have had a massive scandal. He became proud. He hated God. Something, something. But the preacher doesn't give a reason.

It's an enigma. It's a paradox, a mystery. There's no happy ever after ending for this king, but a lonely, tragic ending with no one to delight in him.

[41 : 49] See, the most powerful of us can't even escape the hevel of life. We've seen in our passage today that it is not good when man is alone.

It's not part of our intended design. To that end, the preacher has shown us three better ways to live. You know, better is a handful of quietness than the loneliness of envy.

You know, better is the community that you live in to love the actual people in your life than lonely greed. Better is humility and heeding advice than arrogance and power.

Yet this passage ends to say that even if we do everything right, we follow all the right steps, do everything right according to biblical wisdom, we might still end up alone.

Life still is hevel, a striving after wind, a paradox, a mystery. So what hope do we have that we might ever be in good community with others?

[42 : 55] That hope can only be found in Jesus Christ alone, who can sympathize with our loneliness. Although he lived a perfect and sinless life, a life where people should have been flocking towards him, to love him, to adore him, to accept them as the light of the world.

Jesus was the loneliest person in all of human history. Before the cross and the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus took the closest three, his closest friends, his best friends.

Peter, James, and John. And he confides in them something incredibly raw. He says, my soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

Remain here and watch. He asked them to pray with him. It's a request and support in his greatest hour of trial. But they would just keep on falling asleep.

Even worse, even as Jesus got arrested, they would flee to save their own tales. Can you imagine the loneliness Jesus experienced when he lived with, invested in, loved on these close friends for three whole years, only to then just see them instantly leave, instantly bounce the moment you needed it most?

[44 : 22] Far worse than the desertion of even the closest of his human friends was a separation from his father on the cross.

On the cross where he hung in our place for our sins as a substitute for us. He was despised and rejected by all men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

Yet, all of this couldn't compare to the separation that he experienced with the father. For all eternity, even before creation, the father perfectly loved the son.

No ill-time comment, no bitterness, no pride, no sin had ever fractured that relationship for all eternity. Can you imagine that until the cross where Jesus took on our heinous sins, the father could only turn the other way?

He was cut off from sweet fellowship that had been his sole joy and his so precious treasure throughout his life of hardship, of loneliness.

[45 : 38] That's been the one thing. But even at the cross, he lost it. Yet still, as Charles Spurgeon said, Jesus Christ was up on that cross, nailing, bleeding, dying, looking down on all the people, betraying him, forsaking him, denying him.

And in the greatest act of love in all of human history, he stayed. He stayed, friends. He stayed knowing that without his sacrifice, without him experiencing the greatest loneliness of all of human history, we would have no hope.

We'd never have any hope to be able to overcome and escape the loneliness of this life, this life of Hevel, this life of breath.

What a friend we have in Jesus. What a friend we have in Jesus. Do you know this friend? Do you know the only one that sticks closer to you than a brother?

So, friends, fueled not by envy, insecurity, greed, or pride, but fueled by Jesus' faithful friendship to sinners.

[47 : 00] Let us create community. Fight back the epidemic of loneliness in this church, in our city, in our workplaces, in our families, for His glory and for our good.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you. Thank you for this amazing, faithful, devoted friendship that we have in Jesus.

That He is a faithful friend no matter what, no matter when other people abandon us. We still have you. And that kind of, that friendship, it doesn't take away the pain of loneliness from others because we still need others, but it still gets underneath that pain.

And we thank you for that. We thank you that Jesus is our faithful friend. We pray, oh God, that that would fuel us to make friendships, to invest in others deeply, deeply, committedly, faithfully, so that we'd be able to fight back loneliness in our lives and in others.

And love as you have called us, oh God. So help us for your glory and for our good. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.