

Question: I wish more people would be considerate of the problem of loneliness during the holidays, especially among the elderly. What would Jesus teach his people to do?

Recently I read a report from a British doctor about a conversation he had with a hospitalized 82 year old patient two days before Christmas. In spite of the patient's complaints, all of the x-rays, tests and examinations could find nothing wrong with her health. When the doctor finally told her that she was being sent home, she quietly responded, "I don't want to go home. It's so lonely there and there are so many hours in the day." After a long pause, she asked, "Doctor, can you give me a cure for loneliness?" ("The Epidemic of Loneliness at Christmas Time," *Preaching Today*, Nov. 28, 2011).

Although I have no statistical evidence, I suspect that the number of lonely elderly in our neighborhoods is greater than we may care to imagine. One writer in the above mentioned article has suggested that we have an epidemic of loneliness on our hands. In the highly mobile society of today, family members have been scattered throughout the world, and they often lose contact with each other. Since most older people cannot compete with the busy, active lifestyles of those who are younger, the world seems to pass by them without notice. These folks usually do not want to complain or make demands of younger family members which would inhibit their activities. Thus, they sit quietly alone behind closed doors during cold winter months, hoping someone will call or come see them. They long for someone to share the joy of the holidays with them.

We need to learn how to care for these folks from the compassionate life and teachings of Jesus. He taught that as a shepherd goes in search of one lost sheep out of a hundred, so the Heavenly Father cares for each precious life (Matthew 18:12-14). He illustrated this kind of compassion by helping a man possessed by an evil spirit who lived alone among the tombs (Mark 5:1-20) and by healing a woman whose faith led her to force her way through the crowds believing she could be healed if only she could touch the hem of the garment of Jesus (Mark 5:25-34). Lepers were forced to live in isolation; but when one came to him, Jesus did the unthinkable by reaching out to touch him. By this touch he healed the man (Matthew 8:1-3).

No matter how busy he was, Jesus always took time for anyone who was hurting whether from physical or emotional pain. For example, while traveling to Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, Jesus heard the

lonely cry of the blind Bartimaeus. Many in the crowd rebuked Bartimaeus and told him to be quiet. Evidently they thought Jesus had more important things to do than to be bothered by a poor blind man begging beside the road. But Jesus stopped and had them call the man to him. In his compassion, Jesus encouraged Bartimaeus and gave him the gift of sight (Mark 10:46-52; cf. Mark 10:13-14).

In addition, Jesus would endorse the instructions that Peter wrote to some of the early Christians: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:8-10). God made us to be social beings. We are meant to love and be loved. No one should need to be alone when believers in Jesus are near to love, serve and show hospitality to those in need.

Unfortunately, the holiday season is a difficult time for many people who live alone with no family to share the joy of the season with them. I pray that my readers will consider these people. Why not look around for someone who is alone that you can invite to share in your family Christmas celebration? As our Heavenly Father has poured out his grace on us, may we graciously bless others. This kind of action is not always convenient or easy; but in doing this, we are imitating the life of Jesus and his teachings.

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