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## NEVER ALONE

Loneliness is hazardous to our health. Everyone feels alone sometimes. In fact, it's perfectly normal to want to be alone at times. However, it's never normal to feel a chronic sense of loneliness. Studies have shown that a chronic sense of loneliness can increase chances of an early death by 14%<sup>1</sup>

After experiencing the death of a loved one, too often it can be easy to slip into a chronic type of loneliness. It's not even about being physically alone but it feels that way. Experts tell us we don't have to be physically absent from other people to feel alone. We can actually feel alone in a crowd. "Loneliness", says noted psychologist and author Dr. Guy Winch "... *is an entirely subjective state, in which we feel socially and/or emotionally disconnected from those around us.*"<sup>2</sup> Knowing that loneliness is a subjective state is very important; it means we can do something about it.

Just as experts have figured out we can feel alone even when we're not, the great truth of our human existence is we're never really alone because God is with us. As I mentioned in the last chapter, every human being carries within them the breath of God. If that's true, and I believe it is, then why don't we feel God with us? Why are there times, like in the midst of grief, that we feel utterly and completely alone, even though we aren't? The answer to that question will take a little explanation. Please allow me to get a bit theological with you here in order to help us better understand the presence of God in our life.

Humanity was not created by God to just exist, we were created to exist in His presence. The first humans, Adam and Eve, were created to live in His presence in Paradise. There God was always present to them. They were perfect in their relationship to Him and felt nothing of sadness, guilt, or shame. As it was, sin had not yet entered into their world. However, because the only true love is a love that's free, God created them with the freedom to love or not to love, to obey or disobey. When presented with the temptation to disobey what God told them for their own good, they chose to disobey and everything changed...well, almost everything. You can read all about it in the first few chapters of the Book of Genesis, in the Bible.

After Adam and Eve sinned by choosing to disobey God, they recognized they were no longer in perfect union with Him and death entered into the world. They recognized things had changed. Although they didn't understand the change as death, one thing they did understand was that they no longer felt comfortable in their natural state toward each other. In other words, they realized they were naked and were embarrassed. Things were different, very different. They were even afraid of God's presence so they tried to hide themselves.

But one thing never changed. God never stopped loving Adam and Eve, not one little bit. Why?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-squeaky-wheel/201410/10-surprising-facts-about-loneliness>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-squeaky-wheel/201410/10-surprising-facts-about-loneliness>

Because God is eternally good and incapable of changing His feelings, as we humans do. We can't really understand God in His essence. He's too great and beyond our comprehension. However, we can understand His energies of light and love which are at work in our world. He is the source of all light and love. When we love someone, or when they love us, we're actually experiencing a part of God's life in this world. And, as long as we love or feel loved things seem pretty good in life. Why? Because we are experiencing the blessing of God, even though we may not realize it as such.

However, when we experience loss of any kind, including death, things change. We don't feel loved, either because someone left us taking their love with them, or they died and it seems their love is gone. When someone dies, their love seems gone because they're no longer with us physically.

Here we find an important key to understanding life and death...

***Because someone is no longer with us physically doesn't mean their love is gone.***

Are you still with me? Hang on, this will make more sense as you read a little further. We understand this kind of love when we have to live a long way away from our family. We love them even though we aren't with them and we know they love us. How is that possible? Because God is love and God is life. He transcends time and space so our love is present where they are and their love is present where we are.

Okay, I know this is getting deep theologically so let me try a little pop song philosophy. 90's song artist Phil Collins, probably didn't realize he was singing such great theology when he sang this...

*You'll be in my heart. You'll be in my heart. From this day on, now and forever more, you'll be in my heart. You'll be in my heart. No matter what they say, you'll be in my heart, always.*<sup>3</sup>

Here is a most important point... **death can't stop love because love is the essence of God.** Love is the greatest force in the world and can't be overcome by anything, not even death. Now, you might be saying "Sure Brad, of course my love hasn't stopped. I still love him/her." Of course you do, but what I want you to understand is they still love you too! You're probably thinking "What does that mean?" "They're dead." But, are they really?

Death can't stop life because God is life and all life is eternal because it's flows from His essence. The first thing we must accept if we're to have a better understanding of life is that **life is eternal because it's from God** – and I should add period, full-stop, end of discussion. Life is eternal for all people, of all times, and of all faiths. There's no question that life goes on after death. However, there are many questions as to what life after death is like, and the only answers to that are born by faith; faith in a loving God who is too good to wrong and too wise to make a mistake. You can trust Him.

How can I say that life goes on after physical death? Because, human beings were created for eternity, not just spiritually but physically as well. In order to better understand this, let's look at what Jesus had to say about life, death, and the process of dying.

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<sup>3</sup> "You'll Be In My Heart"; Phil Collins , Walt Disney Records, 1999.

*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

*Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*

-John 5:24-29 ESV

Let's break down Jesus' words into three important points. First, Jesus says whoever believes in the one who sent him into the world (God the Father) **has** eternal life. Now, I love to write, and even though I didn't major in English while in college I know the present tense of a verb when I see one. In any version of the Bible you read these verses, especially in the original Greek, Jesus always says that eternal life is a present possession. That's huge!

### ***Life is eternal because life is from God***

Jesus clears up a great misconception for us about death. We don't actually enter eternal life when we die. Instead, we enter eternal life when we believe in God. That's why Jesus clearly states that the believer "*has*" eternal life not "*will have when he dies*". Eternal life is a present participation in the life and love of God now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen! Let that thought soak in for a while. It's mysterious but so is the whole concept of God and eternity.

The second thing we want to understand from this passage is that death is **not a permanent** state of being. Death comes to our physical bodies but not to our spirits. We are more than just physical beings (More about that in a moment). Jesus is saying that death is a doorway, something we must all pass through. We don't stay in a state of death.

St. Paul the Apostle speaks of this in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians. In chapter four, speaking to people who'd recently lost loved ones and were concerned about their eternal state he said...

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;*

- 2 Corinthians 4:7-9 ESV

The body may be destroyed in death, but not life. The true treasure of life is not the body, it's the spirit that lives temporarily in the body, the treasure in the jar of clay. No matter what happens to the body, the treasure (spirit) is not destroyed. That my friends is not only good news, it's reason for hope! The very treasure of our loved one can't be destroyed by death!

The third thing Jesus says that we want to understand from the passage in John 5 is while we live spiritually, even after death, that's not all there is...*we will live again physically as well*. Here is the best news of all. The body of our loved one we lay to rest in death will one day rise again. Jesus calls this the **"...resurrection of life,"**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the key to everything I'm writing about life and death. Some people choose not to believe in the deity of Jesus Christ because they can't believe in His resurrection from

the dead. I'll admit it's a tall order to believe; no one in the history of the world was ever resurrected...till Jesus. However, to believe in the resurrection is not a blind leap of faith. There is more historical, non-biblical support for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth than for most things we accept as true from our school history books.

C. S. Lewis, the great author and agnostic convert to Christianity said the following about the believability of Jesus as God...

*"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be either a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."*<sup>4</sup>

That was pretty straightforward. We all have to deal with who Jesus is. Sadly, many choose not to believe in Jesus because of the many flaws evidenced by many Christians and church leaders over the centuries. However, even if no one ever lived up to the ideals of the Christian faith, it doesn't render them untrue. It simply means everyone is human and humans are always capable of error.

St. Paul the Apostle also had a lot to say about the resurrection of Jesus in his first letter to the Corinthians...

*Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. **If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.** Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.*

*But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. **The last enemy to be destroyed is death**<sup>5</sup> (Emphasis added)*

So, when death comes it's important for us to remember that death isn't the victor, Jesus Christ is. One day death will be no more. Until then, we can find hope in death knowing it's only temporary, and more than that there is another facet of life and death we need to consider; the fellowship we have

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<sup>4</sup> Mere Christianity; C.S. Lewis, New York : McMillan Pub. Co., 1952.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:12-26 RSV

with those who've died. That may sound crazy to some of you, but stay with me. I'll explain.

The final thought I want to share with you in this chapter is how we realize we're not alone, even after a loved one dies. Let's face it, there is nothing harder than losing a spouse or a child to death. Losing our parents and friends is tough also. All death is tough to deal with, but, when a spouse or child dies it's outside what we feel is the natural order of things. And, even when we realize life goes on after death, we're left wondering, "What do we do about the anxiety that comes from the physical separation? The ancient church's answer to that question was lost to many Western Christians in the fallout from the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century; it's imperative that we uncover their answer.

The Early Christians believed in, and taught a doctrine called *the communion of the saints*. The teaching is part of the confession of the ancient Christian creeds.<sup>6</sup> The belief in a communion between the saints (all Christian believers) living and the saints departed began naturally as a holy tradition. Ancient Christians, like their Jewish Old Testament ancestors, perceived that life went on after death and that those who had gone to the after-life before them, in some way continued in awareness of those left behind. The early Christians began to inscribe words of remembrance on the tombs of the dead. Many of the inscriptions asked the departed to pray for the living who were still on their journey toward Heaven. Such pious thoughts are evidenced by the vision of St John in Revelation 5:8. There we see all the saints of Heaven gathered around the Altar in God's presence with golden bowls full of incense, which he says are "the prayers of the saints".<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps one of the most beautiful passages of scripture that speaks to the communion we have with those in Heaven is found in the Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 11. The writer recounts the lives of many Old Testament saints who kept the faith, even in the face of great tribulation. Then, in Chapter 12, the writer encourages us who remain in this world to continue on with an enduring faith as we run the race of life "...surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses".<sup>8</sup> Our loved ones departed are witnesses along with the saints of the ages to the rest of our earthly journey. Your departed loved one is cheering you on. What a comforting and hopeful thought!

So, how does this knowledge that we have a communion or fellowship with our departed loved ones help us in our journey through the feelings of loss and grief? By helping us realize we're never alone. After the death of one as dear as a spouse or child, or perhaps a best friend, we can take comfort in the knowledge that our departed loved one is still with us spiritually, as we are with them. Somehow, in God's great economy their thoughts are still for us. Even though we no longer see them in a physical way, we can sense them in our hearts and spirits thinking of us... praying for us.

Remember St. Paul's words to us earlier about the treasure we carry in jars of clay? The real treasure is the spirit of life, not the physical body. The spirit is eternal, but the physical body is temporary. Don't get the wrong idea about the body. Even though temporary the body is to be cherished by us, and rightfully so. After all, this physical body is an integral part of how we know and relate to each other. It's in and through the body that we share the love we have for one another. Here we find yet

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<sup>6</sup> The Nicene Creed, and the Apostle's Creed are the oldest agreed upon confessions of essential Christian belief. The Nicene Creed dates to 325AD.

<sup>7</sup> [http://shoebat.com/2014/11/16/powerful-evidence-prove-prayers-saints-part-christianity/;](http://shoebat.com/2014/11/16/powerful-evidence-prove-prayers-saints-part-christianity/)

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 12:1 RSV

another promise to bring us hope; **God isn't finished with our mortal bodies – even after we die.**

The body is an integral part of God's greatest creation of the human person. It is too great and too precious to simply be discarded upon our death. That's why God promises us new life in the resurrection of the dead, which is yet to come. We heard this promise earlier as we read the words of Jesus in John 5.

In the next chapter we will explore the beauty and purpose of the body for this world and the next. One thing we can say for sure...no matter where we are or what is happening in life, God isn't through with us yet; and that's true even when we die. There is hope in death!