



1 Peter 2
9-10
New International Version

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

"Christians are made, not born." Tertullian

"Don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. James 4:4

"Why do you hasten to remove anything which hurts your eye, while if something affects your soul you postpone the cure until next year?" — Horace

BEGIN – BELONG – BELIEVE – BECOME – BUILD



Sermon Notes

BEGIN - BELONG - BECOME

BEGIN with God.

A journey of any significance begins with deep dissatisfaction in the present. (see James 4:4)

BELONG with Christ and the Church.

You cannot be a strong **BELIEVER** unless
you're a strong **BELONGER**.

1. It's how people GROW

"Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm." Proverbs 13:20

1. It's how we experience GOD

"The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." Num 6:24-26

2. It's how we live in God's KINGDOM

"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." Jer. 31:33



Loneliness: Toothache of the Soul

Loneliness is one of life's most miserable experiences. Everyone feels lonely at times, but is there a message for us in loneliness? Is there a way we can turn it into something positive?

Sometimes loneliness is a temporary condition that departs in a few hours or a couple days. But when you're burdened with this emotion for weeks, months, or even years, it's definitely telling you something.

In a sense, loneliness is like a toothache: It's a warning signal that something is wrong. And like a toothache, if left unattended, it usually gets worse. Your first response to loneliness may be to self-medicate - to try home remedies to make it go away.

Is there a cure for loneliness? Is there some secret elixir that will fix this toothache of the soul?

We need to begin with a correct interpretation of this warning signal. Loneliness is God's way of telling you that you have a **relationship problem**. While that may seem obvious, there's more to it than just surrounding yourself with people. Doing that is the same as busyness, but using crowds instead of activities.

God's answer to loneliness is not the quantity of your relationships, but the quality.

Going back to the Old Testament, we discover that the first four of the Ten Commandments are about our relationship with God. The last six commandments are about our relationships with other people.

How is your relationship with God? Is it close and intimate, like that of a loving, caring father and his child? Or is your relationship with God cold and distant, only superficial?

Hardly anyone completely recovers from an addiction without the connection to a support system. Some stop their addictive or compulsive behaviors, but their relational patterns do not change, and most times they relapse if they do not do group work. The reason is complex, but part of it is the alienation driving the addiction itself. Paul calls it the “*continual lust for more*” caused by being “separated from the life of God.” (Eph. 4:18-19)

As people are cut off from others and their souls are starved for connectedness, the need for love turns into an insatiable hunger for something. It can be a substance, status, sex, food, shopping, or gambling, but these never satisfy, because the real need of connectedness to God and others and to God through others.

When people receive that, the power of the addiction is broken.

[Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *People Grow: What the Bible Reveals about Personal Growth*.]

Loneliness is not simply a social problem but is considered increasingly to be a public health issue. While chronic loneliness can affect people of all ages it poses a particular threat to the very old, quickening the rate at which their faculties decline and cutting their lives shorter. Research studies have shown that chronic loneliness is associated with significantly greater risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke;

it contributes to a more rapid progression of Alzheimer's disease and suppresses the functioning of the immune system. Loneliness also reduces life-span, with researchers finding that chronic loneliness poses as large a risk factor for long term health as smoking as well as increasing likelihood of early admission to residential or nursing care.

A groundbreaking AARP The Magazine survey reveals that millions of older Americans suffer from chronic loneliness, and their ranks are swelling: Of the 3,012 people ages 45 and up who participated in our study, 35 percent are chronically lonely (as rated on the UCLA Loneliness Scale, a standard measurement tool), compared with 20 percent in a similar survey a decade ago. Loneliness was equally prevalent regardless of race, gender, or education levels. Unexpectedly, though, age does make a difference: Those who said they are suffering most are not the oldest among us but rather adults in their 40s and 50s.

Today more than 44 million adults over age 45 suffer from chronic loneliness.

- A little over one-third (35%) of the survey respondents were categorized as lonely.
- Older adults reported lower rates of loneliness than those who were younger (43% of those age 45-49 were lonely compared to 25% of those 70+). Married respondents were less likely to be lonely (29%) compared to never-married respondents (51%), and those with higher incomes were less likely to be lonely than those with lower incomes.
- Lonely respondents were less likely to be involved in activities that build social networks, such as attending

religious services, volunteering, participating in a community organization or spending time on a hobby.

- Almost half (45%) of those who had lived in their current residence for less than 1 year reported feeling lonely.
- Loneliness was a significant predictor of poor health. Those who rated their health as “excellent” were over half as likely to be lonely than those who rated their health as “poor” (25% vs. 55%).
- Lonely and non-lonely respondents did not differ significantly from each other in terms of their frequency of email use. However, 13% of lonely respondents felt they have fewer deep connections now that they keep in touch with people using the Internet, compared to 6% of non-lonely respondents.

Colin Powell is a retired 4-star general in the United States Army who also served as the first African-American Secretary of State under President George W. Bush. Obviously, Powell is a very brilliant man who has made many wise choices that enabled him to succeed like he has in his career. One of his famous quotes goes like this:

“The simple but true fact of life is that you become like those with whom you closely associate - for the good and the bad.”