

Alone! And Sad About It
By Larry Augsburger
Genesis 2:15-22.
January 25, 2009

- I. I'm not a big Hollywood fan, but there are some films I like, and one of those is the movie, *While You Were Sleeping*.
- A. Now I know it's a chick flick, but one of the reasons I like this movie is its depiction of what a powerful force loneliness can be.
- B. Lucy, the character played by Sandra Bullock, is a lonely young woman living by herself in Chicago where she works for the Chicago Transit Authority.
1. She has no family and only a few friends—largely people she works with.
 2. But when she rescues Peter, a CTA passenger, from being run over by a train and tries to follow up on his condition as he lies in a coma, she gets caught up in his family, a strong and warm, if eccentric group, who think she's engaged to Peter.
 3. It's not until she's actually standing in the hospital chapel, preparing to marry Peter, shortly after he wakes up that she realizes what she's doing.
 - a. She stops the wedding and then attempts to explain to everyone how her loneliness got in the way of her better sense.
 - b. Once she found the community of family, she didn't want to let go.
 4. Her loneliness brought her right to the point of this marriage to a stranger in order to gain a family before she woke up and walked out.
- II. *While You Were Sleeping* shows us what a powerful force loneliness can be, and we want to look at it as the second topic in our “We Smile on Sunday, But Come Monday...”series.
- A. We smile on Sunday, we act like we're doing great, we act like life is just fine, but we hide how lonely we are inside.
1. We hide how we long for more social interaction.
 2. We hide how alone we feel—even in our marriage or our family.
 3. We hide how alone we feel in a room—or a life—full of people.
 4. There are many people who smile and put on a good front but who are dying inside from loneliness.
- B. Now before we can look at addressing loneliness, we need to define it.
- C. The definition I want to work with today is that loneliness is a combination of two factors.
1. The first factor is aloneness—to be by oneself, to be separate from others.
 - a. Aloneness may be result of being alone—you may live by yourself, you may have few natural avenues of human contact.
 - b. But aloneness may also be because of failure to connect even though you are surrounded by people.
 - (1) Can be caused by depression, introversion, fear, shyness or different interests.
 - (2) A person can be very alone in a room full of people.
 - (3) There are husbands and wives, children and teenagers, elderly people and college students who feel terribly alone.

2. But aloneness, by itself, is not enough to create loneliness.
 - a. Sometimes alone people are very happy with aloneness.
 - b. They may carefully cultivate it, or, at least they don't mind it.
 3. A second factor is necessary to turn aloneness into loneliness.
 - a. It's the factor of feeling sad about one's aloneness.
 - b. It's a feeling of emptiness or hollowness inside.
 - c. A feeling that everyone else in the world is happy, content and in relationship while you languish alone, abandoned, ignored.
 4. Loneliness is defined very well by our title—*Alone! And Sad About It*.
- III. A major increase in loneliness is an unintended consequence of modern society.
- A. People have suffered from loneliness all through the ages, but it has come to its peak here in modern America.
 - B. One major reason for the epidemic in loneliness is a breakdown in community as we have lost many of our traditional ways of being in relationship with each other.
 1. This breakdown is chronicled by the very significant book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, which documents our trend away from relationship and toward aloneness.
 - a. Now this book documents the collapse of community very well.
 - b. But it gives little evidence of revival—it only talks of what needs to happen if we are going to experience a revival of community.
 2. One place we see this break down in community is in family life.
 - a. It used to be that several generations lived together—grandparents, parents, children, at least—with assorted others thrown in.
 - b. But now each generation lives separate and unto itself which has produced an increase in loneliness among all generations.
 - c. Loneliness generally bites older and younger people the hardest.
 - (1) Often there was a bond between older and younger while middle generation worked to support family.
 - (2) I was fascinated at the men's breakfast yesterday as Trent Metcalf talked about how fortunate he was to grow up with both sets of grandparents close by and how he benefitted from the time he spent with both of his grandfathers.
 - (3) But that seldom happens in many families anymore—Trent and Alice's grandchildren are in Nebraska, and they won't have the benefit of close grandparent contact like Trent.
 - d. Changes in how we are family has produced much loneliness.
 - C. A second factor which has multiplied aloneness in a variety of ways is technology.
 1. For example the automobile insulates us from each other.
 - a. It keeps us from interacting as we did when we walked or used a horse or bike or when we rode mass transit.
 - b. Shuts us in and others out.
 - c. I thought about that Thursday evening as I walked on Kohler Rd.
 - (1) An Amish man spoke to me as he biked past.
 - (2) Then when the bottom of his bag broke and his purchases fell out on the road I helped him gather stuff up and figure

- out a way to load his stuff on the bike without the bag.
- (3) We had a nice conversation until he was ready to go again.
 - (4) And it never would have happened if either of us had been in a car.
2. Another example is the magical allure of television and computers which leads us to isolate ourselves in our homes and away from other people.
 3. Even when we share the same space with people, cell phones, texting, I-pods, lap tops and video games interfere with community.
 4. Air conditioning keeps us inside homes and decreases social interaction.
 5. A major symbol of the loss of social interaction is the disappearance of the front porch which used to serve as a center for family and neighbor interaction for 6 months a year.
- D. As I think of all this I'm reminded of a neighbor who lived across the street from us in West Liberty.
1. We never met her, and I only knew what she looked like because of the glimpses I got of her as she walked between garage and house.
 2. She did no gardening, had no flowers, and someone else mowed her lawn.
 3. She checked her mail in her car on the way to work at 6:30 in the morning so she never met anyone at the mailbox.
 4. Thanks to how she used her car, house and garage as a barrier, we never met even though our front doors were 200 feet apart.
 5. With millions living like this, community is down and loneliness is up.
- IV. Now in the face of all this loneliness, it is important to observe that it is God's intention that people should live in community, and not be alone, and not experience loneliness.
- A. This is a principle that is established right away in Genesis 2 as the Lord attempts to find an adequate companion for Adam.
1. He comments that, *It is not good for man to be alone.*
 2. Then He discovers that animals aren't adequate and creates Eve.
 3. The coming of Eve instituted marriage and family and human interaction to address aloneness and loneliness.
- B. Psalm 68:6 notes that *God sets the lonely in families.*
1. It's this contrast between loneliness and family that sets up the tension in *While You Were Sleeping.*
 2. The answer to Lucy's loneliness lay in being absorbed into a family, and once she had it, she didn't want to give it up.
- C. Acts 2:44-46 emphasizes the community of the early church. *All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.*
- D. The Bible is clear that human interaction, love and community is what God

intended for his people.

1. He intended the community of marriage, and brothers and sisters, and aunts and uncles, and cousins and grandparents, and assorted others.
2. He intended the contact of village and street and well and workplace.
3. He intended the brother and sisterhood of community and church.

E. It was God's intention that no one should be lonely.

F. Yet, many are lonely.

V. Which leads us to the question, "What is the answer to loneliness?"

A. This is an especially crucial question as we live in a society which has lost so much of its natural community.

B. The first batch of answers is self-help answers for those who are feeling lonely.

1. The most critical point is to admit that you feel lonely.
 - a. Acknowledging that you're lonely gives you the ability to attempt to do something about it.
 - (1) You can't correct a problem you don't know you have.
 - (2) Once you name it, you can do something to address it.
 - b. And then once you've named it for yourself you need to report your new-found realization to others.
 - (1) Now I'm not talking about whining or self-pity.
 - (2) But an objective statement of your need can invite support, understanding and changes in behavior from your friends.
 - (a) They may have not been inviting you to stuff because they thought you didn't want to be invited.
 - (b) They may have thought you were jealously guarding your aloneness.
2. Having acknowledged you are lonely then gives you a chance to develop a strategy for addressing your loneliness.
 - a. Refuse to be passive and helpless. Instead attack the problem.
 - b. One step is to address your aloneness by finding ways of increasing your interaction with other people.
 - (1) You might volunteer or join groups or get a job.
 - (2) Get a hobby and join a hobby group.
 - (3) Join a small group or several of them—Bible study, prayer, book discussion, bridge.
 - (4) Do something about your aloneness.
 - c. Second, you can take steps to address your sadness.
 - (1) Tell your doctor about your sadness so you might be evaluated for depression.
 - (a) You might be depressed because of your aloneness or depression might be causing your aloneness.
 - (b) Be willing to accept medication.
 - (2) A second thing you can do is to be intentional in changing how you feel.
 - (a) Now I know we often say that how you feel is how you feel and there's not much you can do about it.

- (b) But yet, once you understand what's going on, you can take conscious steps to change how you feel.
 - (c) You can choose to say "I am okay. I can live with my situation, and here are mental strategies I can use to rise above my sadness."
 - d. Now both of these strategies have looked at loneliness from a human perspective—increasing your interaction with humans and addressing how you feel about your loneliness.
 - (1) But there is also a strategy of looking beyond human interaction to relationship with God.
 - (2) God longs for relationship with us, and having a relationship with him is something real.
 - (3) There are people who go to great lengths to create space in their lives so that they can be in relationship with God.
 - (4) So if you already have space in your life, you are well-positioned to develop that relationship with God.
 - (5) You can fill that space by reading his word, and spending time in communion with him in prayer.
 - (a) I know that to uninitiated that sounds unsatisfying.
 - (b) But to those who experience it it is real and profound.
 - (6) A relationship with God is an answer to loneliness, but it requires some effort and intentionality.
 - e. Now I want us to notice that in all these cases, either increasing contact with humans or with God, the answer lies with the one who is alone taking the steps to initiate action.
- C. But it is not only the lonely who should bear the responsibility for responding to the problems of loneliness.
 - 1. The church bears a responsibility for addressing loneliness also.
 - 2. And I think it already does that by the community it creates.
 - a. It creates community by gathering for worship, SS, small groups.
 - b. It creates community by the caring that goes on between people.
 - 3. But the church could be more intentional about addressing loneliness.
 - a. It needs to be more intentional about counteracting the loss of community and about building community.
 - b. And that is the responsibility of all of us.
 - (1) Now a portion of this is covered by the visits of the pastors.
 - (2) But it needs to be much more than just pastoral visits.
 - (3) Each of us has the responsibility to care about the loneliness of each other.
 - (a) Often times it doesn't happen with the natural flow.
 - (b) It needs intentionality.
 - 4. Jesus speaks in Matthew 25 about those who feed the hungry, invite in the stranger, look after the sick and visit the prisoner.
 - a. Many of these categories include the reality of loneliness.

