

Family Seasons When Alone

Lesson #4 for April 27, 2019

Scriptures: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Philippians 4:11-13; 1 Corinthians 7:25-34; Matthew 19:8; Genesis 2:18; 37:34; Isaiah 54:5.

1. God never intended for human beings to be lonely. Adam had barely been created when he found himself married! One of the first things He did after humans were created was to perform the marriage ceremony. But, unfortunately, there are times when people are lonely.

A fascinating yet painful story made the news years ago. A young woman had been found dead in her apartment. Though the death was tragic itself, what made the story worse was that the woman had been dead for more than 10 years before being found. Ten years! Thus, the question that people had asked, and rightly so, was: *How in a big city like this, with so many people, and with so many means of communication, could a woman, who was not a street person, have been dead for so long and no one know?*—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath, April 20. [Italic type is in the source.]

2. Who was paying her rent and her utilities? And who was her landlord? No one cared or knew?
3. Have you ever been truly lonely? How does that feel? Do you know others around you who might be lonely? How can we reach out to someone who is lonely?
4. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. These verses contain an obvious message. Two are stronger than one, and three are even stronger. In many tasks, it is more efficient to work together.
5. Some of us may enjoy having periods of time alone. But, none of us can make it completely alone for a lifetime. First of all, we must have parents. Even if those parents did not care much about us or were irresponsible, we would not exist without them.
6. So, how many lonely people do you think there are in our church, in the communities where we live, or even at work? One unmarried man said he was with people all week long at work. On Sabbath, he was with people at church. But, on Sundays, he felt very lonely!
7. Read John 16:32-33 and Philippians 4:11-13. Jesus warned us clearly that difficult times may be ahead. Ellen White warned that a time is coming when we may have to stand singly and alone. (5T 707.2)
8. Paul understood what it was like to live a single life. At one time, he had been married; but, when he was changed by that experience on the Damascus road, apparently, his family abandoned him. But, we need to remember that no matter what may happen—even if we are in prison or dying—God is still with us.
9. Read Genesis 2:18. Think of Adam's situation. God Himself was there to be his Friend. We know that, later, angels came and taught Adam and Eve. They were probably there at the beginning as well. All the animals came to Adam to be "named"! But, despite all that company, Adam still needed a human companion; and, thus, Eve was created. And Adam said:

Genesis 2:23: "At last, here is one of my own kind —

Bone taken from my bone, and flesh from my flesh.

'Woman' is her name because she was taken out of man."—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Genesis 2:23). New York: American Bible Society.

10. We may assume that because someone is in a place where there are a lot of other people, they could not be lonely. That is a terrible mistake. People can feel very lonely even in crowded cities. So, how do we discover who is feeling really lonely? Do we understand how to reach out to them? Are we willing to do that? Some of the people who are really lonely are not easy to be

around! How should we relate to those people? Do we have any examples of Jesus relating to people who were really lonely? The woman at the well at Sychar? (John 4) Lepers?

11. Think of some groups of people who live a fairly lonely life—who live alone and do not even live with another person, at least not a friend. Are such people condemned to loneliness? There are some people who choose to be unmarried because they feel less fettered by a spouse and family; it makes it easier for them to, for example, go on a mission trip on a moment's notice if they want to.
12. Read 1 Corinthians 7:25-34. Paul had some very careful advice for both the married and the unmarried. He suggested that if you are not married, you should remain that way; but, if you are married, do not separate from your spouse. He recognized that those who are married have a lot of worldly responsibilities. So, he suggested that in light of the fact that he believed the second coming of Christ would be very soon, it was better not to marry.
13. We are nearly 2000 years closer to the time of the end than Paul was! How should we feel about Paul's advice? Was it intended to be specific for the people in his day who were facing persecution by the Roman government? Was Paul wrong?
14. Is it God's plan for everyone to eventually get married? Not everyone who was important in the Bible was married. Jesus was not! Jeremiah was not. (Jeremiah 16:1-3) And although Ezekiel was married in his early life, his wife died suddenly; and he was told not even to mourn. (Ezekiel 24:15-18)
15. The story of Hosea is remarkable. He was told to go and marry a prostitute. Later in the story, we realize that she went back to her old lifestyle and had two more children that were apparently the result of her relationships with other men. Then, God told Hosea to go and buy her back; and the price he was to pay was enormous. What happened to that first child when mom left?
16. Is it possible considering the state of the society in Hosea's day that maybe Gomer was the best choice that Hosea had available? (See Hosea 1-3.) Of course, God was trying to use the story of Hosea as an illustration of His relationship to the children of Israel. The northern tribes that had organized themselves into the nation of Israel were about to be conquered and scattered by the powerful nation of Assyria, never to be heard from again.
17. But, at least we can be certain that not everyone needs to marry. Our lives are not defined by our marital condition. (See Romans 12:1-2.)
18. Could a person live a life similar to the life of Paul in our day? How would that work out? Would s/he need to be employed by the church? Or, could s/he join an independent ministry? Could s/he do it alone? When we are standing singly and alone, won't we be witnessing?
19. Suppose that you are comfortably married and attending a small church. Do you feel comfortable inviting singles over to your home? Should churches organize "singles groups"? Should we encourage singles within the church to associate with other singles?
20. God hates divorce. (Malachi 2:16) Why is the divorce rate not only in the world but also in our church so high? It hovers around 50%. What is the reason for that terrible situation?
21. God intended for us to learn much about Him by our relationships with spouses and children. Then, is it any surprise that Satan has done everything possible to disrupt marriage? Are young people, particularly, prone to make bad choices for companions in marriage? Is that why there are so many divorces? There is no such thing as a good divorce. Does divorce hit harder those who are divorced? Or, those who feel so upset by the situation that they choose to divorce? What percentage of divorces take place amicably? Are both parties in a divorce at fault to a certain degree? In our society it is usually the man who chooses whom he will ask to marry him. Women, of course, have the option of saying, "No"! How many women say, "Yes" because they are afraid no other man will ask them? Is that a good basis for choosing to marry someone?
22. What does the Bible teach about divorce? See Malachi 2:16 above and Matthew 5:31-32; 19:8; and 1 Corinthians 7:11-13. No matter what the overall circumstances, divorces are hard on all

who are affected, especially the children if there are some. The wonderful plan that God intended for marriage gets torn apart.

“The Church as a redemptive agency of Christ is to minister to its members in all of their needs and to nurture everyone so that all may grow into a mature Christian experience. This is particularly true when members face lifelong decisions such as marriage and distressful experiences such as divorce. When a couple’s marriage is in danger of breaking down, every effort should be made by the partners and those in the church or family who minister to them to bring about their reconciliation in harmony with divine principles for restoring wounded relationships (*Hosea 3:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11; 13:4-7; Gal. 6:1*).

“Resources that can be of assistance to members in the development of a strong Christian home are available through the church or other church organizations. These resources include: (1) programs of orientation for couples engaged to be married, (2) programs of instruction for married couples with their families, and (3) programs of support for broken families and divorced individuals.”—*The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 19th edition (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2016), p. 161.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, April 23].

23. The church manual advises us to read *Hosea 3:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11; 13:4-7; and Galatians 6:1*. How many divorces would take place if we really all practiced what it says in *1 Corinthians 13*? Would divorce even be possible? Clearly, the other verses suggest that even if a husband and wife are separated for a period of time, God would prefer that they get back together.
24. Those who are having difficulties in their marriage should first seek a qualified Christian counselor who could at least suggest ways to improve such a relationship. But, if that is impossible, it is important to seek legal counsel to cause the least amount of disruption/pain/anger that is possible especially if there are children involved.
25. The final separator that will ultimately affect all of us—unless Jesus comes first—is death. Of all the traumatic things that impact a person’s life, the death of a spouse is probably the most difficult.
26. Think about Adam and Eve. Which one of them died first? We do not know. The death of the one who died first must have been terribly wrenching for the other one. Notice these words from Ellen White.

As they witnessed in drooping flower and falling leaf the first signs of decay, Adam and his companion mourned more deeply than men now mourn over their dead. The death of the frail, delicate flowers was indeed a cause of sorrow; but when the goodly trees cast off their leaves, the scene brought vividly to mind the stern fact that death is the portion of every living thing.

The Garden of Eden remained upon the earth long after man had become an outcast from its pleasant paths. The fallen race were long permitted to gaze upon the home of innocence, their entrance barred only by the watching angels. At the cherubim-guarded gate of Paradise the divine glory was revealed. Hither came Adam and his sons to worship God. Here they renewed their vows of obedience to that law the transgression of which had banished them from Eden. When the tide of iniquity overspread the world, and the wickedness of men determined their destruction by a flood of waters, the hand that had planted Eden withdrew it from the earth. But in the final restitution, when there shall be “a new heaven and a new earth” (*Revelation 21:1*), it is to be restored more gloriously adorned than at the beginning.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 62.1-62.2.

27. Have you ever tried to imagine what their family did when either Adam or Eve died? How did Cain’s descendants get along with Seth’s descendants? See *Genesis 6:1-2, KJV*.

28. There is a lot of death recorded in the Old Testament. Think of the sacrifices that were offered every day at the temple. Remember that the whole point of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament was to remind people that sin leads to death. Unfortunately, we have become so accustomed to death that we often just take it for granted. We were never supposed to experience death either ourselves or to have anything or anyone around us die.
29. Read Isaiah 57:1; Revelation 21:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18; Matthew 5:4; 2 Samuel 18:33; and Genesis 37:34. These verses make it very clear that people normally feel terrible when someone close to them dies.
30. We are so fortunate to have clear biblical explanations from God Himself about what happens at death and what the future holds for the dead! But, how will we respond if we are inside the New Jerusalem and we see someone who was dear to us outside and about to perish eternally?
31. Even to imagine such a thing hurts. To lose a spouse, a child, or parent hurts a lot; and it will lead often to a significant period of hurting, loneliness, and reevaluation of our own lives.
32. Is it the church's responsibility to try to reach out to those who are hurting following the death of a loved one?
33. The answer or answers to this question will depend to a great degree on the size of your church and the qualifications of those who make up the church. Some churches will have qualified counselors or pastors who have been trained to help people at such times. Other, smaller churches will not have anyone like that available. Some churches may not even have a regular pastor. In such cases, it may be necessary to reach out to some professionally-trained individual.
34. Many of us may know someone who for whatever reason is a faithful church member but is married to someone who is not. They may have become an Adventist after marrying that person. That spouse may approve of their involvement in the church; or, they may not. How should we relate to these people who are "spiritually single"? What encouraging words might the Bible have for them? See Isaiah 54:5; Hosea 2:19-20; and Psalm 72:12. Always, God is there and wants to be our Friend.
35. If the church reaches out to those who are spiritually single or even to their partners, will it lead to greater animosity? Ideally, a partner might eventually feel that he or she is being won over by the faithfulness of the spouse or the friendliness of the church. That would be ideal.

In the midst of a life of active labor, Enoch steadfastly maintained his communion with God. The greater and more pressing his labors, the more constant and earnest were his prayers. He continued to exclude himself at certain periods from all society. After remaining for a time among the people, laboring to benefit them by instruction and example, he would withdraw, to spend a season in solitude, hungering and thirsting for that divine knowledge which God alone can impart. **Communing thus with God, Enoch came more and more to reflect the divine image. His face was radiant with a holy light, even the light that shineth in the face of Jesus. As he came forth from these divine communings, even the ungodly beheld with awe the impress of heaven upon his countenance.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 86.4-87.0 (1890); *Gospel Workers** 52; *CC** 30.2; *SD** 20.4. [Bold type is added.]

36. Do you think you know any "Enochs"? Do you sometimes feel that you need to get away for a period of Bible study and reflection? Do you think you can tell by talking to other people or even looking at them if they are truly lonely? Do you know what the people in the church around you are going through? What about reaching out to people who have lost a spouse? How can the church learn to be more sensitive to an individual's needs? If your church is large enough, it may be appropriate to form a singles group. What kind of activities would be appropriate for a singles group at your church? What about Sabbath meals? Or, a potluck? Other groups could be organized for outings such as hikes, viewing of flowers, etc.
37. Do you think you could live the life of a "Paul"? Think of the society in which he lived. Does it

matter whether you choose that time of quiet and separation from others? Or, whether it is forced upon you by circumstances?

38. We will never solve the problem of loneliness here on this earth. God, in the future kingdom in heaven and then on this earth made new, is the only ultimate answer to loneliness. We have discussed various things which have interrupted even the best of relationships.
39. There was a young man who decided he wanted to live alone. He went to a remote part of Alaska where he kept a journal of how things were going. He lasted about 100 days until he died of starvation. He wrote in his journal:

“HAPPINESS ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED.”—In Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), p. 189.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 52].
40. It is almost always true that the greatest happiness comes when we share circumstances with others.
41. Perhaps, that is why God said: “It is not good for the man to live alone.” (Genesis 2:18, *GNB**) That expression in Hebrew for *not good* was not used again until Jethro admonished Moses, “What you are doing is not good.” (Exodus 18:17-18, *RSV**) Was that God’s advice?
42. Adam must have been very busy in the last part of the sixth day of creation associating with God and the angels, studying and naming all the animals, etc. Could he possibly have had an opportunity to feel lonely?
43. God could have easily created Adam and Eve together at the same time; however, He did not. Why not? Did Adam learn something important by being alone for that short time? Did Eve feel that she was cheated by not being there from the beginning?
44. Remember that Eve was not only Adam’s wife but also his companion, friend, coworker, and spiritual associate. They were everything to each other.
45. So, is it possible to be not alone even if you are not married?
46. Think of the experience of Eve at the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Was she there alone? If so, where was Adam?

There is disagreement among scholars as to whether Adam was present with Eve during the serpent’s temptation. The argument that he was present revolves around two points: the text speaking of Eve’s eating the fruit and giving some to her husband “with her” (*Gen. 3:6*) and the serpent using plural verbs as if he is talking to more than one person. In support of Adam’s absence, he is conspicuously absent from the dialogue, and appears neither as the subject or object of any sentence in the narration. There is an exclusive verbal volley between Eve and the serpent: “He [the serpent] said unto the woman” (*Gen. 3:1, 4*) and “The woman said unto the serpent” (*Gen. 3:2*). The controversial phrase “with her” can be understood in a relational rather than spatial context as in the way Adam retold events to God, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (*Gen. 3:12*). Obviously, “with me” in Adam’s words means “with me as my companion,” and “with her” in the narrator’s words likely means the same thing. As far as the serpent using plural verbs and pronouns, this diction shows that Satan’s target was both Adam and Eve. The use of plurals would make it all the more surprising that Adam didn’t speak up if he were indeed there. For a brief study of the subject, see Elias Brasil de Souza, *Was Adam With Eve at the Scene of Temptation? A Short Note on “With Her” in Genesis 3:6.*—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 53-54. [Italic type and content in brackets are in the source.]

47. Would the fall have been prevented if Adam and Eve had stayed together?

The angels had cautioned Eve to beware of separating herself from her husband

while occupied in their daily labor in the garden; with him she would be in less danger from temptation than if she were alone. But absorbed in her pleasing task, she [54] unconsciously wandered from his side. On perceiving that she was alone, she felt an apprehension of danger, but dismissed her fears, deciding that she had sufficient wisdom and strength to discern evil and to withstand it. Unmindful of the angels' caution, she soon found herself gazing with mingled curiosity and admiration upon the forbidden tree. The fruit was very beautiful, and she questioned with herself why God had withheld it from them. Now was the tempter's opportunity. As if he were able to discern the workings of her mind, he addressed her: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Eve was surprised and startled as she thus seemed to hear the echo of her thoughts. But the serpent continued, in a musical voice, with subtle praise of her surpassing loveliness; and his words were not displeasing. Instead of fleeing from the spot she lingered wonderingly to hear a serpent speak. Had she been addressed by a being like the angels, her fears would have been excited; but she had no thought that the fascinating serpent could become the medium of the fallen foe.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 53.5-54.0; *CTr** 21.3; *CC** 15.4; *DG** 23.4.

48. Think of what Adam and Eve did after their sin. When God came to speak with them, they tried to hide! Sin is a self-damaging condition. They were afraid to be associated with God! But, the history of the Old Testament makes it very clear that God has gone to extraordinary lengths to maintain His connection with the human family. He even drowned almost the entire human race in a flood because He realized that He had almost lost contact with the human race. Noah was the only one who was still paying attention to God. What if God had waited another generation or two until no one was listening to Him?
49. When God was developing a relationship with the children of Israel, He set up His tabernacle or tent in the very center of the encampment. Hasn't that always been God's plan for our lives?
50. While human companionship forms a very important part of the lives of many people, each one of us, nevertheless, has an individual need for a relationship with God. If we do not have that relationship, there will be not only spiritual loss but also a constant hunger for something which we may not even recognize.
51. Jesus promised the woman at the well of Sychar (John 4) a spring of water, welling up to meet her needs. Jesus and the gospel that He has proclaimed is that well of water. Each of us may partake of it.
52. God is always present. (Acts 17:27) He sees what we are going through, and He promises never to leave us. (Genesis 16:13; Deuteronomy 31:6; and Matthew 28:20)
53. The best thing that a person can do who feels lonely is to turn to God. When one has a present and living relationship with God, one can never feel completely alone. God is constantly pursuing us with His love.
54. Think how sad it is for those who believe that God does not exist and that there are naturalistic explanations for the origin of life and our presence on this world. No wonder so many of them are committing suicide.
55. Getting along with others may not always be easy. Scott Cormode, Director and Hugh De Pree Professor of Leadership Development at Fuller Theological Seminary, has said that in close relationships: "Without conflict there is no honesty; without honesty there is no intimacy; without intimacy there is no community."
56. Is that why so many people in our world today are lonely?

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