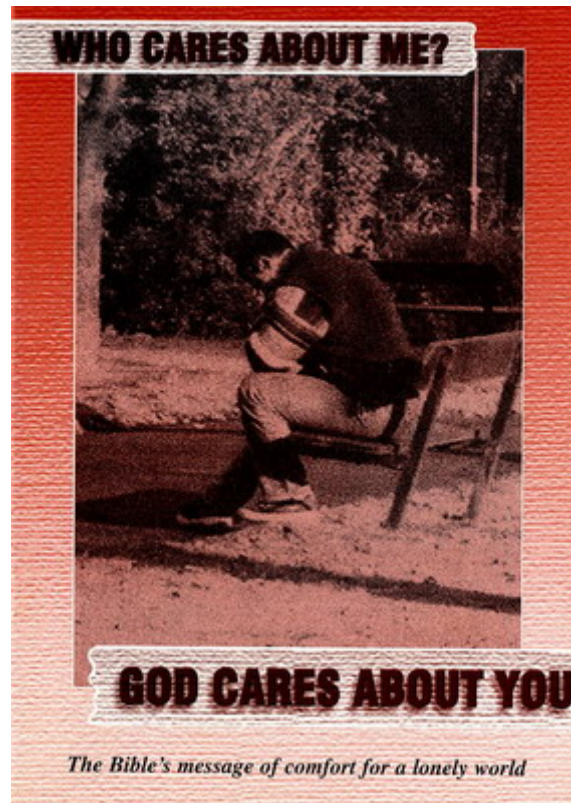


# WHO CARES ABOUT ME?



# GOD CARES ABOUT YOU

*The Bible's message of comfort for a lonely world*

# Who cares about Me? - God cares about You

## The Bible's message of comfort for a lonely world

This crowded world can be a lonely place. As life gets faster and noisier, and communication ever easier, it can be more and more difficult to find someone to talk to.

Some people feel themselves cut off from society, perhaps because for some reason they don't quite fit. Others become stranded after the death of loved ones or a family break-up. Or isolated by a problem or illness that nobody else understands.

It is a great comfort to know that there is someone who not only cares, but understands, completely - and can help, and will help. That someone is God, of course.

*The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, A refuge in times of trouble. And those who know your name will put their trust in you; For you, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you. Psalm 9:9-10*

### A basic fact about God

First of all, we need to get one basic fact straight. Here are words from another Psalm, in which the writer muses about God:

*Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there your hand shall lead me, And your right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139:7-10)*

God is everywhere. In the Bible there are accounts of people who tried desperately to run away from God, but couldn't (for example Jonah, whose story is in the Book of Jonah). For those who would rather live their lives without God, this may be an unpleasant thought. But for the rest of us, it should be a great comfort. This is how Jesus looked at it:

*"re not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." (Luke 12:6-7)*

But it's very easy to say "It's OK, God loves me." It's not always so easy to be convinced of it. Why not? What's wrong? Surely if God really cares for us, he should show it... Actually, that's the wrong attitude to have.

We need to take a step back, and look at our lives from God's point of view.

### Three basic facts about us

Why are we here? If God created the heavens and the earth, as the Bible says he did, why did he do

it? Let's look at some Bible passages that tell us.

Paul was a Christian in the First Century AD, a dynamic teacher who travelled the Roman empire preaching Christianity. One day he found himself in the Greek city of Athens, and was amazed at the host of shrines and temples in the city - they made shrines to every god they could think of, and more besides (just to be on the safe side). Paul stood up and proclaimed to the Athenians that they'd got it wrong, there is only one God.

*"God, who made the world and everything in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is he worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, since he gives to all life, and breath, and all things. And he has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth ... so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." (Acts 17:24-27)*

Why did God create us? So that we should seek him, and find him. He wants to have a relationship with us.

Here is another passage. It's a song of praise to God, recorded in the book of Revelation:

*"You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honour and power; For you created all things, And by your will they exist and were created." (Revelation 4:11)*

God created the heavens and the earth, and us, in order to give him 'glory and honour and power'. And another verse, this time from a Psalm:

*The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him. (Psalm 147:11)*

Why did God create us? Here are three reasons:

- ♦ To come to know him
- ♦ To praise him
- ♦ To give him pleasure.

So, rather than thinking "If God cares for me, why doesn't he show it?" we ought to be thinking "If God has given me life itself and all the other blessings I enjoy, what am I giving him in return?" This change in attitude can make a tremendous difference in our lives. It can be the first step towards finding God, and all the blessings which follow.

Let's now have a look at what God wants us to do with our lives.

## **The right way and the wrong way to live**

The book of Ecclesiastes opens with a startling declaration:

*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." (Ecclesiastes 1:1-2)*

Vanity - or futility, or nonsense, or meaninglessness. Everything is vanity!

The 'Preacher' who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes was probably Solomon, the king of Israel at that nation's height of power and glory, around 1000 BC. The Bible, in the first chapters of the First Book of Kings, explains how God gave to Solomon wisdom above anyone else alive, and also fabulous riches. It tells how at the start of his reign he was a good and God-fearing king, but as time went on he went 'off the rails', and became greedy and cruel and forsook God. It may be that the book of Ecclesiastes was written at the end of his lifetime, as he looked back and learned from all his mistakes. His verdict: "All is vanity."

He had applied himself to study and research (chapter 1 verse 13); to having a good time (2 verse 1); to drink (verse 3); to great building projects (verse 4); to acquiring beautiful possessions (verse 8). He stopped at nothing in his pursuit of happiness and fulfilment. His approach to life was remarkably similar to that of many people today:

*Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labour; And this was my reward from all my labour. (Ecclesiastes 2:10)*

But somehow, it just didn't deliver what he was looking for. One day he stood back and took stock:

*Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labour in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2:11)*

How many people today devote themselves to the pursuit of happiness and fulfilment in just the way the Preacher did. If only they would read his wise words, they'd save themselves a lot of trouble!

The Preacher is telling us a fundamental fact about human existence: life without God is empty. This is a constant theme throughout the Bible.

Look at it like this: God designed us in a certain way. There is a right way and a wrong way to use these precious lives God has given us. If you go out and buy yourself a stereo system or a washing machine, you'll receive with it a set of instructions which tell you how to get the best use out of it. The instructions are written by the people who made the appliance, and therefore you can trust that they know what they're talking about. It's the same with us - we were designed to function in a certain way. We are given instructions (in the Bible) which explain how to get the best use out of our lives. We can ignore the instructions, but if we do we shouldn't be surprised if our lives fail to function properly, or break down.

So what does God tell us is the best way to get true enjoyment and fulfilment out of life? The Bible is full of guidance. This is the Preacher's conclusion:

*Fear God and keep his commandments, For this is the whole duty of man. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)*

It's a great shame that so many people today have the wrong idea about what it is to be a Christian. They think that it's all about obeying difficult commandments and being forbidden to do anything that might be fun. They're wrong! Yes, some things are forbidden by God - things that are destructive or unhealthy or selfish. And some things are required by him - disciplines and attitudes that are healthy for us and good for others. Christianity is a wholesome and enjoyable way of life. And as we'll see shortly, it's about far more than just this life here and now ...

What have we seen so far? God knows us, each one of us, and he cares about us. He wants us to draw close to him and enter a relationship with him. He has designed us in such a way that we will only ever find true fulfilment in life when we are in this relationship with him.

### **The example of Jesus**

There are some people who seem to go through life thinking always of others. As well as making the world a warmer place for everybody else, they tend to be very happy people.

The Bible spells out for us what we all know:

*“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:38)*

Those are words of the Lord Jesus - and he, above anybody else, was an example of someone who devoted himself to giving.

Just one episode from his life. It was the occasion of the miraculous feeding of five thousand people, and you can read it in Mark's Gospel chapter 6, beginning at verse 30. It was a hectic time in Jesus' life - he and his disciples were worn out with their preaching work, his fame was spreading far and wide and people were flocking to him to hear him teach and to be healed of diseases.

In order to get some time to rest and talk together, Jesus and the disciples got into a boat and fled across Lake Galilee. But the crowds saw them go, figured where they were headed and made their way around by the shore. When the boat came to land, with its exhausted occupants looking forward to some peace and quiet, there was the crowd waiting to meet them.

You might have forgiven Jesus for saying, “Look come back tomorrow - I need a meal, I need some sleep, I can't go on like this.” But instead, when he saw the crowds, ‘he was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd.’ So he settled down, and spent the whole day teaching and healing.

Finally, as evening drew on, his disciples came to him and pleaded with him to send the crowds away. But he wouldn't send them away until he'd fed them. That's the background to one of the most marvellous miracles of sharing and giving, the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

To be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus Christ. What a better place the world would be if more people were more like him! He is the perfect role model. But is this all that Christianity is - being good to people? May we suggest that it is not. A relationship with God is more than this.

### **Love your neighbour**

Somebody once asked Jesus what is the most important rule to follow in life. Jesus replied with two important rules, one which was most important and one which came next. He quoted two verses from the Bible. (The Bible at that time wasn't the Bible as we know it, of course. If you look at your Bible you'll see that it's divided into two sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The New Testament hadn't been written in Jesus' time; the Bible he used was the Old Testament.) These are the two commandments he quoted:

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39)*

‘Love your neighbour’ is a famous saying. Like many quotes from the Bible, it’s just passed into our language and many people don’t realise where it’s from. Everybody agrees it’s an excellent rule to live by. What we should remember is that it was originally a secondary commandment. The first commandment is to love God.

It’s like a building. A building needs a foundation to stand on, if it doesn’t have a foundation it’s likely to fall down sooner or later. The first commandment is the foundation; the second commandment is the building which stands on it.

People have developed various philosophies over the years, which seek to get men to live in peace and harmony with each other. Many of these philosophies are based on Humanism, a system of thought which denies the existence of God. These philosophies do not work, and the societies that are built on them collapse. (Witness the demise of Communism in Europe in the last century, for example.) Why do they not work? Because they’re trying to construct the building without the foundation.

What must come first is love for God. This is not difficult, when we consider how much God loves us, and what he has done for us:

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)*

That’s how much God loves us - he gave his only son to die for us.

This is the foundation of the Christian life: God’s love for us. It is amazing, beautiful and beyond our understanding. God so loved us that he gave his only son, his beloved son Jesus Christ, to die for us to save us from our sins. Jesus Christ so loved us that he willingly gave his life for us. When we fully appreciate what has been done for us, we cannot help but respond with love for God and his son. And this is a love that must naturally extend to others. This is ‘love for your neighbour’ which has a foundation.

If you’d like to look these up, Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

## **The love of God**

The love and mutual care that exists (or should exist) within a Christian community is something beyond the experience of most people.

The apostle Paul wrote a number of letters to different Christian churches, which are preserved in our New Testament. In many of these letters he spells out how Christian love should work in everyday life. For example:

*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)*

It is a love which is firmly based on the love God first showed to us:

*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)*

As we go on, and consider some examples of how the Bible offers comfort in various circumstances of loneliness, we have to stress that this comfort is completely meaningful only for those who have taken the step of entering a relationship with God - for those who can call themselves 'friends' of Jesus.

Only his friends know the true depths of his love. These are his words:

*"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you." (John 15:12-14)*

Jesus showed his love by laying down his life for his friends. His friends must show that same love to each other. His friends are those who obey his commandments.

What have we seen so far? Life without God is vain and meaningless, and it will be ultimately unsatisfying. Jesus Christ showed us how we should live - he devoted his life to God.

If we are to follow Jesus, our lives must be devoted to God like his was. This involves obeying Jesus' commandments. This is really the subject of other booklets, but suffice it to say here that it involves:

- ♦ believing the things God has told us about himself
- ♦ admitting that we are sinners and naturally rebellious against God
- ♦ repenting of our sins
- ♦ being baptised
- ♦ then trying to lead a new life, in obedience to God.

This is what it means to be a Christian.

For the remainder of this booklet we'll look how the love of God works in practice. We'll look at a number of different causes of a feeling of loneliness, and we'll see the comfort that true Christianity brings in each case.

### **The loneliness of guilt**

There are few things that can isolate someone so much as a sense of guilt. We all mess up from time to time, and sometimes we mess up very badly.

Here's a consolation: whatever appalling thing you might do, you will probably never get close to what King David did.

King David, we're told in the Bible, was 'a man after God's own heart' - a man God loved very much. This was despite an enormous sin that David committed. The account of it is in the Second book of Samuel chapter 11.

David had everything he could possibly want. But we're never satisfied however much we have. One day David took a fancy to the wife of one of his officers. He had an affair with her, while her husband was away at war. When she discovered she was pregnant, he got scared. He arranged to have her husband killed in battle, then married her himself. Adultery, and murder!

For a while he kept the sordid affair secret, and he endured an agony of guilt. Then the truth came out. Psalm 51 was written at this time. It is a song of repentance, and also of relief that his hiding and denial is over:

*Have mercy upon me, O God, According to your loving-kindness; According to the multitude of your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only have I sinned, And done this evil in your sight (Psalm 51:1-4)*

Notice a crucial and surprising point: as far as David was concerned, his sin was 'against God, and God only' - not Bathsheba, the woman he had humiliated, or even Uriah the man he had killed. Of course, it was terrible what he had done to them, but what really mattered was that he had sinned against God. And that was the key to the healing of his tortured mind.

People can be unforgiving. God is always prepared to forgive. When we recognise that whatever sins we commit, however foul, they are primarily sins against God, we are on the way to peace of mind - because God has assured us that as soon as we repent, as soon as we tell him we are sorry, he will forgive and forget - completely.

*For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is his mercy towards those who fear him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear him. For he knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103:11-14)*

But we still have to live amongst people, don't we. And they're not always as forgiving as God.

Jesus told a parable, which you can read in Matthew 18 verses 21 onwards. It's the story of a king who had a servant who owed him 'ten thousand talents' - a colossal sum, running into millions of pounds in today's money. There was no way he could possibly repay the debt, so the king had compassion on him and wrote off the debt. The servant promptly went out and found a friend who owed him a few pence. The friend begged for time to pay, but he refused and had him thrown into prison until it was paid. When the king got to hear about this heartless behaviour he summoned the man, reinstated his old debt and had him thrown into prison until it was paid.

The parable is a story about real life. The king is God. The man with the huge debt is us, every one of us - we are all sinners and faced with an impossible debt to God. Anything that our fellow humans can do to us, by comparison, is so small as to be not worth thinking about. God is willing to forgive us our debt, and he commands that we forgive each other. If we don't forgive others, God will not forgive us.

So if ever we should feel cut off from people by a sense of guilt, remember: our sin, whatever it is, is against God. He is always prepared to forgive. If others are not prepared to forgive, it's their problem, not ours!



## **The loneliness of a family break-up**

Throughout our society, relationships are disintegrating at an alarming rate. The number of households with only a single adult is multiplying. We all know the harm that family break-ups do to all concerned, especially any children. What comfort is there in such situations? Actually there is much comfort.

Jesus knew what it was like to be separated from his family: we're told that his brothers and sisters did not believe in him, and it caused friction. There was one occasion when they decided it had all gone too far, and they decided it needed to stop. This is recorded in Mark chapter 3:

*And the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. But when his own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." (Mark 3:20-21)*

Jesus always had other people's interests at heart, and he cared for his own family as much as anyone else - but later in this chapter he said a remarkable thing.

*Then his brothers and his mother came, and standing outside they sent to him, calling him. And a multitude was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you." But he answered them, saying, "Who is my mother, or my brothers?" And he looked around in a circle at those who sat about him, and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and mother." (Mark 3:31-35)*

The Bible often uses the language of the family, when it talks about the community of believers. We are called the 'household of faith', the 'children of God'. All true Christians are members of this worldwide family - the unmarried, separated, widowed, orphaned, everyone.

And as in ordinary families, members have a responsibility to look out for problems and help each other - so it is in Christ's family.

## **The loneliness of illness**

Paul uses another picture to describe the family: think of it, he says, as a human body.

*For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12)*

We are all parts of the body - some are feet, some are hands, some are eyes ... we're all different, we have different talents and different roles to play in the big family, but we all belong. And, naturally, we're all very important.

*And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Corinthians 12:26)*

When you stub your toe, you feel pain, your whole body is alerted. You hop about and clutch your foot and sit down and nurse it, and you don't think of anything else until the distress is over. That's how it should be in the body of Christ. When the body is working properly, all its members are alert and sensitive to any other members that might be suffering, either in body or in mind. And if

problems occur, we should never be slow to offer comfort and help.

### **The loneliness of bereavement**

Jesus had some very dear friends, a man called Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. They lived in a place called Bethany just outside Jerusalem. Jesus and his disciples would often stay with them when they visited Jerusalem.

John chapter 11 tells how one day Lazarus fell desperately sick. The distraught family sent for Jesus. Strangely, Jesus did not respond straight away - he delayed a few days, then he said to his disciples,

*“Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.” Then his disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get well.” However, Jesus spoke of his death. (John 11:11-13)*

Jesus knew what they didn't know - Lazarus had died. He had delayed going to Bethany in order to show them a marvellous thing: as far as God is concerned, death is just sleep. You fall asleep, you can be woken up again.

They arrived in Bethany and were met by a scene of mourning. Martha went to meet them:

*Then Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even though he dies, he shall live.” (John 11:21-25)*

Martha expressed her faith that her dead brother would rise again at the 'last day', but Jesus demonstrated his power and compassion by raising Lazarus to life, there and then.

From this episode we learn a lot about death:

- For the Christian, it is no more than a sleep, with the prospect of awakening at the end of it.
- It is still a painful experience for those who are left behind - for all her faith, Martha was stricken with grief at her loss. This chapter tells how Jesus himself shed tears, he was deeply moved by people's grief.
- In Jesus Christ there is comfort. He is not there for us in the same way that he was for Martha, but we have his assurance: “I am the resurrection and the life.”

### **The loneliness of age**

The book of Ecclesiastes contains a brilliant piece of poetry, describing growing old:

*In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, And the strong men bow down; When the grinders cease because they are few, And those that look through the windows grow dim; (Ecclesiastes 12:3)*

In this passage the 'keepers of the house' and the 'strong men' are the arms and legs, the 'grinders' are the teeth, and the 'windows' are the eyes. Here and in the surrounding verses we are presented

with a scene of slow decay.

Ageing, disease and death are a part of life. There is no escaping them. At least, not yet. But for the Christian, there is more to life than these few years of toil and trouble. There is a confident hope for the future. The Bible is full of it. Here is a vision of the future we find in the book of Revelation:

*And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4)*

The Bible explains clearly that one day (nobody knows exactly when), Jesus Christ will return to the earth. Paul again:

*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you should sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus ... For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first... (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16)*

What a glorious prospect to look forward to!

Paul wrote his second letter to his friend Timothy when he was an old man. It was probably written from a prison cell as he awaited execution under the emperor Nero.

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7-8)*

Did ever anyone approach death so calmly and cheerfully?

### **The reward of the faithful**

Martha declared her confidence in the 'resurrection at the last day'. Paul looked forward to receiving a 'crown of righteousness'. What was it they spoke of?

The Bible is full of pictures of the time that is to come on the earth. The first chapters of Genesis tell how mankind alienated themselves from God and brought a curse upon themselves and the world; the rest of the Bible is concerned with telling us how God set about undoing that curse. It involves Jesus Christ giving his life to bring us back to God. There is promised a time when Christ will return to the earth, raise and judge the dead, give eternal life to those who have tried to follow him, sweep away the godless misrule of man and set up an everlasting kingdom on an earth restored to the beauty in which it was created. Here is just one picture of that time:

*The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;... Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the*

*blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert. (Isaiah 35:1-6)*

This is the glorious prospect which those who belong to God have to look forward to. It is the same vision that spurred on Jesus himself through the difficulties of his life:

*...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)*

### **A constant friend**

What is Jesus doing now, at this moment? The Bible tells how he died, and rose to life again, then ascended to heaven. But before he left his disciples, he said to them:

*“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)*

In the letter to the Hebrews, we learn that Jesus’ role now is as a High Priest for his followers. What is a High Priest? In the days of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, there were certain men called priests whose job it was to help the nation in their worship. The High Priest was the man who had the special duty of leading them in their spiritual life. His role involved ‘mediating’ between God and the people.

The High Priest in the Old Testament was a picture to show us what Jesus is doing now. We are told that he is in God’s presence, presenting our prayers to our Father. He is always there, a constant help in every situation. And he knows what we are going through, because he was once frail and mortal like us.

*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)*

There is no trial or temptation we can endure, no emotion we can have, that Jesus has not experienced.

Really? Did Jesus ever know what it was like to be truly lonely?

### **The depths of loneliness**

The time came when Jesus was to die. He knew it - he had talked about it. He was prepared for it. His death was the only way we could be saved from our sins. It was going to be a horrific ordeal, but he was determined to go through with it.

On the night before his death, he said to his disciples:

“Indeed, the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.” John 16:32

That night he took his disciples out to a garden they knew. (You can read these events in Matthew’s gospel chapter 26.) He asked them to watch with him while he prayed, but they all fell asleep. Even so, God was watching, and he sent an angel to strengthen Jesus in his agony.

A band of soldiers came to arrest him. All the disciples forsook him and fled. Alone, Jesus was led to Jerusalem. All that night he stood on trial. He was condemned to die, then thrown into the Roman garrison to provide amusement for a savage band of soldiers who abused and beat him; and finally he was led out to be executed. The account in Matthew 27 verses 32 onwards describes the process of crucifixion. He was nailed by his hands and feet to a wooden cross and hoisted into the air, and left there while his enemies stood round and mocked him.

Only a small group of very close friends, along with his mother, kept a vigil at the foot of the cross. John 19 verse 25 relates his last act of kindness - even at this terrible time he was thinking of others. Towards the end, Jesus felt completely alone.

*Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:45-46)*

He died.

That wasn't the end, of course. His father had not forsaken him. The Gospels go on to describe the glorious events of the next few days, how he rose to life, greeted his friends, and later ascended to heaven.

There are just two points we want to note. Firstly, our Lord knows exactly what it is like to be lonely, abandoned, turned against and cut off. He has been through it all. However alone we might ever feel, he knows exactly what it's like. Secondly, his experience shows that in reality God never leaves his children completely alone.

### **What does this mean for me?**

There is someone who cares. God cares!

We can speak to him - by prayer.

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6.7).*

And we can listen to him - by reading his word, the Bible.

*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope (Romans 15:4).*

Think about this:

*Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. (James 4:8)*