

# STRONGER TOGETHER

A RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY SPOUSES | Vol. 43 | Issue One 2026



# HIS BELOVED



# STRONGER TOGETHER

Issue 1  
2026



## ON THE COVER

At times we all experience seasons of discouragement, loneliness, or sorrow. Yet through it all, God's covenantal and faithful love never fails. Scripture reminds us that He has "lavished great love on us" (1 John 3:1). He is our refuge and strength (Isaiah 41:10; Psalm 9:9), the One who bears our griefs and carries our sorrows (Isaiah 53:4, 5). Even more, He "rejoices over us with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17). In every circumstance, we can rest assured that we are His beloved (Song of Solomon 6:3).



SCAN TO READ ONLINE

## | ARTICLES

- 12 WHEN LOVE FEELS LOST**  
*Hope for a hidden heartache*  
Eric Bates
- 21 HOPE BEYOND DEPRESSION**  
*God will return our joy*  
Heather-Dawn Small
- 25 ESHET CHAYIL: WOMAN OF VALOR**  
*Another look at the Proverbs 31 woman*  
Hannele Ottschofski

## | FEATURES

- 03 EDITORIAL**  
Dealing with Loneliness in Ministry
- 05 SPECIAL QUOTES**
- 06 FAMILY MATTERS**  
Healthy Friendships
- 10 TIPS TO THRIVE**  
Upheld by God's Love
- 17 LIFESTYLE**  
Motivating Good Self-Care
- 28 KIDS**  
You're Never All Alone!
- 31 NEWS FROM THE FIELD**

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# DEALING WITH LONELINESS IN MINISTRY



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## WE ALL FEEL LONELY SOMETIMES

AT A RECENT MINISTERIAL COUNCIL meeting, a psychologist asked more than 200 pastors to form groups of two and write a list of seven ways ministry has negatively impacted their lives, then share it with the rest of the participants. I was struck by the fact that loneliness topped the list for so many.

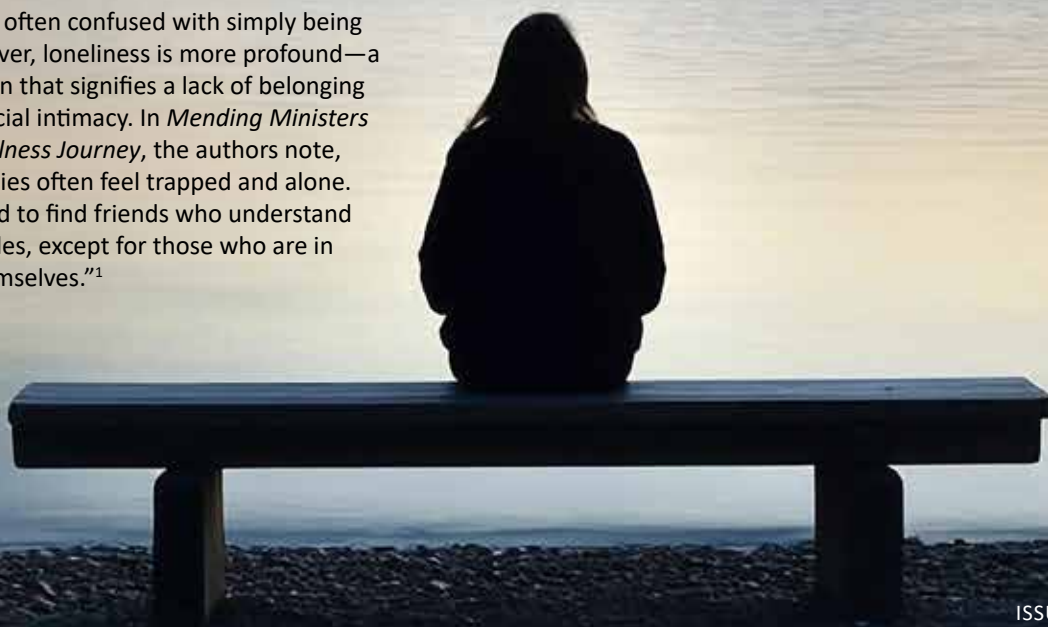
How can pastoral families, constantly surrounded by people—church members, community individuals, and family—still feel lonely? During my ministerial training, I was advised not to form friendships within the church to avoid favoritism, which often made it challenging for my family and me to cultivate close relationships without inadvertently excluding others.

### WHAT CAUSES LONELINESS?

- Sometimes we avoid people to protect ourselves. We don't want others to see the real us.
- Living in a fast-paced urban environment can hinder meaningful social interactions, leading to feelings of isolation even when surrounded by others.
- Technology and social media connect us globally, but they often alter how we communicate, leading many to prefer texts and social media over face-to-face interaction.
- Elderly individuals may be less integrated into family and community life, which amplifies their sense of isolation.

Loneliness is often confused with simply being alone. However, loneliness is more profound—a disconnection that signifies a lack of belonging and deep social intimacy. In *Mending Ministers on Their Wellness Journey*, the authors note, "Clergy families often feel trapped and alone. It can be hard to find friends who understand these struggles, except for those who are in ministry themselves."<sup>1</sup>

*Loneliness is not merely an emotional experience; it has substantial health repercussions.*



## LONELINESS AND HEALTH

Loneliness is not merely an emotional experience; it has substantial health repercussions. Dr. Robin Miller, an integrative medicine expert, defines loneliness as “perceived isolation,” where the quality or quantity of relationships doesn’t meet social needs.<sup>2</sup> The consequences include increased risks for:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Obesity
- Weakened immune systems
- Anxiety and depression
- Cognitive decline and Alzheimer’s disease

Loneliness is as damaging as smoking 15 cigarettes daily and is more harmful than obesity.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Miller states, “Loneliness negatively impacts your emotional and physical well-being. Taking care of your social life is just as important for your health as maintaining a good diet or getting enough sleep.”<sup>3</sup>

## BIBLICAL INSIGHTS

The Bible emphasizes the human need for companionship. Genesis 2:18 states, “It is not good for the man to be alone,” highlighting the impact of loneliness on well-being. Luke 2:52 notes Jesus’ social growth. As an adult He valued close relationships with friends like Lazarus, Martha, and Mary.

## HOW TO DEAL WITH LONELINESS

Dealing with loneliness can be challenging, but there are ways to manage and overcome it. Here are four ways:



### • Deepen Your Connection with God

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8). Loneliness

often reveals a deeper spiritual hunger for communion with God. Spend time daily in prayer, praise, and Scripture meditation—not just asking but listening. Turn solitude into sacred time. Journal your prayers, memorize Scripture, or walk in nature while talking with God.



### • Strengthen Meaningful Human Relationships

We are living in the most connected age in human history—yet, paradoxically, it is also the age of deepest disconnection. We know that “[t]wo are better than one . . . for if they fall, one will lift up his companion” (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10). Isolation deepens loneliness; connection heals it.

Reach out intentionally to family, friends, and church members — even when you don’t feel like it. Join or start a small prayer or study group. Serving and praying together builds bonds of love.




### • Serve Others in Love

“He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed” (Proverbs 11:25). Service redirects focus from our pain to God’s purpose. Volunteer in church, community, or online ministries. Write encouraging notes, visit someone who is lonely, or pray for others daily. Serving with compassion fills the heart with joy and reduces self-centered loneliness.



### • Remember that You Are Never Alone

Always be conscious of God’s presence in your life. You are never truly alone—God promises His presence even “to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

It’s okay to feel lonely occasionally, but chronic loneliness warrants attention. By building deeper connections with others and nurturing an open relationship with God, we can mitigate the loneliness epidemic and its associated health risks. 

<sup>1</sup> Ivan Williams, Petr Cincala, and René Drumm. *Mending Ministers on Their Wellness Journey: Insights from Research on Pastor Health* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2022), p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Miller. *The Scientific Guide to Health and Happiness* (Chantilly, VA: Wondrium, 2021), p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

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# Special Quotes

by Ellen G. White

The servants of the Lord must expect every kind of discouragement. They will be tried, not only by the anger, contempt, and cruelty of enemies, but by the indolence, inconsistency, lukewarmness, and treachery of friends and helpers. . . . Even some who seem to desire the work of God to prosper, will yet weaken the hands of His servants by hearing, reporting, and half believing the slanders, boasts, and menaces of their adversaries. . . . Amid great discouragements, Nehemiah made God his trust; and here is our defense. A remembrance of what the Lord has done for us will prove a support in every danger. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" And "if God be for us, who can be against us?" However craftily the plots of Satan and his agents may be laid, God can detect them, and bring to naught all their counsels.

—*Christian Service*, p. 239

Let all who are afflicted or unjustly used, cry to God. Turn away from those whose hearts are as steel, and make your requests known to your Maker. Never is one repulsed who comes to Him with a contrite heart. Not one sincere prayer is lost. Amid the anthems of the celestial choir, God hears the cries of the weakest human being. We pour out our heart's desire in our closets, we breathe a prayer as we walk by the way, and our words reach the throne of the Monarch of the universe. They may be inaudible to any human ear, but they cannot die away into silence, nor can they be lost through the activities of business that are going on. Nothing can drown the soul's desire. It rises above the din of the street, above the confusion of the multitude, to the heavenly courts. It is God to whom we are speaking, and our prayer is heard.

—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 174

Are you tempted to give way to feelings of anxious foreboding or utter despondency? In the darkest days, when appearances seem most forbidding, fear not. Have faith in God. He knows your need. He has all power. His infinite love and compassion never weary. Fear not that He will fail of fulfilling His promise. He is eternal truth. Never will He change the covenant He has made with those who love Him. And He will bestow upon His faithful servants the measure of efficiency that their need demands. The apostle Paul has testified: "He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. . . . Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10.

—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 164

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# HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

WHY WE NEED THEM AND HOW TO FORM THEM

I WAS A YOUNG MOM in a new town. My husband was pastoring a challenging church. We were the only young family, and I felt so lonely. Each day I strapped my toddler into her buggy, snuggled my baby boy into a carrier on my chest, and walked to the local park. Just walking past other people helped me feel less alone. Then I met another mom in the park. Our children were the same ages, she lived around the corner from me, and she was also named Karen.

We met in each other's homes and chatted over hot drinks and cookies while our children played together. We talked about faith, life, parenting, and everything in between. She helped me flourish when our church was full of criticism and conflict. Our friendship was a gift from God at the loneliest time in my life. This week we met again after several years of letter-writing and chatted as if we'd never been apart.

#### **LONELINESS IS NORMAL**

Humans need other humans. In the beginning God told us: "It is not good for the man [or woman] to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). God is a wonderful friend to all His beloved children, and Jesus promises to be with us always, so we are never truly alone (Matthew 28:20). Many godly people in the Bible felt lonely because they needed other human beings, just as we do. In many of the stories, God helped them find a friend, like Naomi and Ruth, or reconnect with their community, like the woman at the well.

God created us to have warm and close relationships with other people, because we are safer, happier, and healthier when we are part of a community. So it's normal to feel lonely when we don't have many friends, when we're in a new place, when we're caring for a new baby, or when we've lost someone we love.

Loneliness is an epidemic, despite our constant connection with others through our cell phones and social media. Severe loneliness can shorten our lives by up to a decade. Just imagine! By being a friend to someone else, you are helping both of you be happier, healthier, and live longer!

#### **THINKING ABOUT LONELINESS**

When you feel lonely, be kind to yourself. Tell yourself that it's normal because God designed us for connection. Ask yourself: When do you feel most alone? When do you feel less alone? When do you most enjoy being alone, and when do you least enjoy being with people? What would it take for you to feel less lonely? To see people? To have deeper conversations with people? How could you fill those gaps in your life?

*Many godly people in the Bible felt lonely because they needed other human beings, just as we do.*



Look around and see who else might be feeling lonely. Walk and sit in places where people gather safely. Try starting a conversation when you're buying groceries, waiting in line, or sitting in a park. Volunteer to work with a local charity or join a special interest group. Call an old friend, write a letter, or set up a video chat online so you can see each other. Maybe there's someone in your own family who is lonely right now whom you can reach out to.

Are you lonely for more time with your spouse? Be good friends with each other too. Plan a distraction-free hour at least once a week and go for a walk, visit a café, or work as a team on home repairs or a garden.

*God created us to have warm and close relationships with other people, because we are safer, happier, and healthier when we are part of a community.*

### FINDING FRIENDS

It's not easy to make and maintain friendships as a pastoral spouse. Each move brings goodbyes, creates distance, and involves building relationships in a new community. After a few moves the goodbyes hurt, and it can be harder to make new friends. And someone, somewhere in our church history, spread a rumor that pastors and their families should not make friends with church members in case people think they have favorites. This advice has caused so much pain and distress over the years.

Even Jesus had different circles of friends. He was closest to three disciples, Peter, James, and John. The next circle of friends was His disciples. But there were many other followers of Jesus whom He called special friends. Jesus needed special friends in His life, and we certainly need them too.




When we move to a new district I befriend someone else who is new to the church. I also try to build relationships with people in the community by joining a hobby club and talking to people at my bus stop or the café where I occasionally eat lunch. Is there someone in your church who needs a friend? Even smiling at people on the street can help you feel better.

### POSSIBILITIES, NOT PROBLEMS

If you are struggling with aloneness, make a list of things you enjoy doing on your own to help your time alone be happy and meaningful. Discover a new hobby, learn another language, or write a book. Make another list of things you can do to bless other lonely people. Start your own mini ministry. Visit the lonely, elderly, or sick people in your neighborhood and do kind things for them. I began walking with an elderly neighbor each week to help her experience nature and feel confident going outside, and now we have become friends. My mother is caring for my father at home. She knits beautiful representations of Bible characters to encourage young families to share Bible stories.

### A MINISTRY OF FRIENDSHIP

Perhaps your church could organize events to help people feel less lonely, such as lunches for the elderly, a free café with healthy drinks and snacks, playtimes for young children to attend with their families, or craft afternoons where people can chat, make simple things, or learn how to paint. A community garden on the church property brings people together to grow healthy food. Some churches host board game evenings so young people can enjoy playing games with people in real life.

Lonely people are everywhere. Even if you don't feel lonely right now, ask God to show you someone who needs your friendship. They will bless you too—more than you can ever imagine. 

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*Karen Holford is an introvert. She has several close friends, and each of them invited her to be friends with them. They are all gifts from God, and they have been an amazing blessing in her life.*

*When you feel lonely,  
be kind to yourself.*





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## UPHELD BY GOD'S LOVE WHEN WE FEEL LONELY AND DISCOURAGED

LONELINESS AND DISCOURAGEMENT are two of the most common challenges faced by ministerial spouses. Even though we play important roles in the church, we can sometimes feel alone or downhearted. The unique pressures of supporting our spouse and being part of a church community can leave us feeling isolated or unnoticed.

For many, stepping into the role of a minister's spouse means learning as you go. There isn't a manual or training, and you might find yourself deeply involved in church life simply because of your relationship to the pastor.

Sometimes, in the quiet moments between the demands of ministry, it helps to remember that there is no single measure of effectiveness—only the sincere love and dedication you bring to those around you. Setting personal goals for how you serve and finding joy in even the smallest acts of kindness or support can be a gentle reminder

of your unique purpose. Every effort, seen or unseen, is meaningful, and your presence is a gift to your church and community.

It's normal to have moments where you feel lonely or left out. The first step toward feeling better is to recognize these emotions. Reaching out to connect with others in the ministry community can provide comfort and support. Remember, you're not alone—many have felt this way too, and together you can find encouragement and understanding.

### RESTING IN GOD'S LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS

Even in the hardest moments as ministerial spouses, we are gently held by God's unwavering faithfulness. When loneliness or discouragement threatens to overwhelm, we can find refuge in the promise that we are never truly alone. By leaning into our faith, we find a deep source of comfort and strength—reminding us that every step of this journey is guided by divine care. Trusting in God's loving presence allows us to rest, knowing that no matter how heavy the burden, His grace is always sufficient, and His love never fails.

Jesus is always present, on our side, and intimately aware of our struggles. He hears our prayers and understands the weight of our exhaustion and loneliness. In these moments, Jesus invites us to find rest in Him—honestly bringing our emotions, fears, and weariness into His compassionate embrace. His love, strength, and gentleness sustain us, carrying us through every season. Let us turn to Jesus for the comfort and healing our souls long for, trusting that His faithfulness will always uphold us.

### **STRENGTHENING OUR MARRIAGE**

The unique pressures of ministry life can at times feel overwhelming, weighing on both heart and spirit, yet it is precisely in these moments that caring for our marriage becomes even more precious. A marriage grounded in love and mutual support can be an anchor in the storms—offering reassurance, warmth, and a reminder that we are not alone in the journey. Together, hand in hand, you can lean on each other for comfort and strength, drawing courage from your shared faith to navigate the challenges and celebrate the joys of serving side by side.

**Reserve quality time together** to focus on each other through shared activities or meaningful conversations.

**Take walks together.** Whether early in the morning or after a long day, walk hand in hand. Even a brief, 15-minute walk can offer you a chance to unwind, share your thoughts, or simply enjoy each other's quiet presence.

**Spend spiritual time together** through prayer and shared moments with God. These shared moments are essential for couples. Bringing our struggles and frustrations to Jesus as a couple allows us to be open and honest, drawing closer in love and understanding. This practice helps keep our hearts centered and strengthens our relationships with one another as we minister to those around us.

### **REMEMBERING OUR CALLING**

Recognizing the value of our calling as a ministerial spouse can provide strength and purpose during challenging times. Reflecting on our calling reminds us of the impact our support has on our spouse, our church family, and our community, giving us motivation to keep going.


**Embrace our role**, recognizing the importance of our responsibilities and their connection to a greater mission. This perspective can transform struggles into opportunities for growth.

**Stay focused on why we serve**, remembering the bigger calling behind ministry. This can help us stay strong and find meaning in our work.

### **SERVING WITH JOY**

Despite the challenges, we need to remember that our journey as a ministerial spouse is a special opportunity to serve with joy and dedication. When our race is finished, we can look forward to hearing the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:23).

Serving in ministry is a profound calling that involves both struggles and blessings. By building relationships, focusing on spiritual growth, nurturing our marriages, and remembering why we serve, we can thrive in our role as ministerial spouses.

How do you find joy and encouragement in your ministry journey? 

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*Angelina Wood has dedicated over 41 years to various ministry roles, including educator, administrator, and leader within conference departments. Together with her husband, she continues to contribute to the North American Division in multiple capacities. Angelina enjoys gardening, reading, hosting gatherings, and exploring new experiences with her husband.*

*Jesus is always present, on our side, and intimately aware of our struggles.*

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# WHEN LOVE FEELS LOST

HOPE FOR PARENTS ESTRANGED FROM  
ADULT CHILDREN

ONE OF THE LONELIEST, deepest sorrows many Christian parents carry today is being estranged from an adult child. It's a pain that hides behind polite greetings at church and family photos on the mantel. Pastoral families are not excluded from the heartache of estrangement.

Perhaps your grown son hasn't called in months. Perhaps your daughter cut off contact after a painful disagreement. Or maybe the drifting away happened so slowly that you hardly noticed until the silence became heavy and cold.

A study by Cornell University found that 27 percent of Americans 18 and over have cut themselves off from a family member.<sup>1</sup> That's roughly 67 million people in the United States who experience some level of estrangement with another family member. It's far more common than many realize—yet so often it feels too shameful or complicated to talk about openly.

#### **TYPES OF ESTRANGEMENT**

Estrangements between adult children and parents take different forms. For example, therapeutic-developmental issues, immaturity, a child's lack of brain development, or a parent's poor communication skills are often solvable, as resolution simply requires time or skill development. Hard-wired issues such as addictions and mental illness are more challenging. Situational estrangements caused by time apart, such as college or military service that takes the adult child far from home, or a pandemic that forces isolation, are often resolved as circumstances change.

The most challenging and common type of estrangement (90 percent of all estrangements) is leveraged estrangement. It is influenced by a third party, such as a peer, social media, a therapist, a stepparent, or

your child's spouse, for example. These estrangements are the most challenging to reconcile because a third party—a saboteur of reconciliation efforts—works behind the scenes.<sup>2</sup>

Parents of estranged adult children can experience intense emotional trauma. Many experience manifestations of this trauma in the form of nightmares, flashbacks, insomnia, compromised cognition and memory, rumination, depression and anxiety, guilt, gastrointestinal maladies, headaches, skeletal issues, skin disorders, arrhythmias, and negative relational and spiritual effects.

If this is part of your story, you may feel intense shame, but take heart: you are not alone, not alone among God's people, and certainly not alone before your Heavenly Father. The Bible speaks honestly about the struggles within families, and it offers surprising hope even when love feels lost.

#### **HONEST PORTRAITS OF BROKEN FAMILIES**

One of Scripture's gifts is its refusal to sugarcoat reality. From the very first family, broken relationships are part of the story.

Consider Adam and Eve. They rejoiced over their first sons, Cain and Abel, until envy turned Cain into his brother's murderer. Imagine the anguish of parents who lost both sons in one day: Abel to death, Cain to banishment and wandering.

Later, Israel's history records betrayal, rebellion, and heartbreak among families chosen by God Himself.

*A study by Cornell University found that 27 percent of Americans 18 and over have cut themselves off from a family member.*

**A ROYAL TRAGEDY**

Few biblical accounts illustrate estrangement more painfully than the story of King David and his son Absalom.

People admired Absalom for his beauty and charm. But his sister, Tamar, suffered a terrible violation at the hands of her half-brother Amnon—and David, her father, failed to act decisively. Absalom, burning with anger and a sense of betrayal, took revenge and killed Amnon. Then he fled into exile for three years.

David longed to see his son but did not take the steps to reconcile. Even after Absalom returned to Jerusalem, father and son did not speak face-to-face for two more years. Five years of wounded silence grew into deep resentment.

Eventually, Absalom rebelled openly, undermining his father’s rule and turning many Israelites against him. The rebellion failed, but it ended with Absalom’s tragic death in battle.

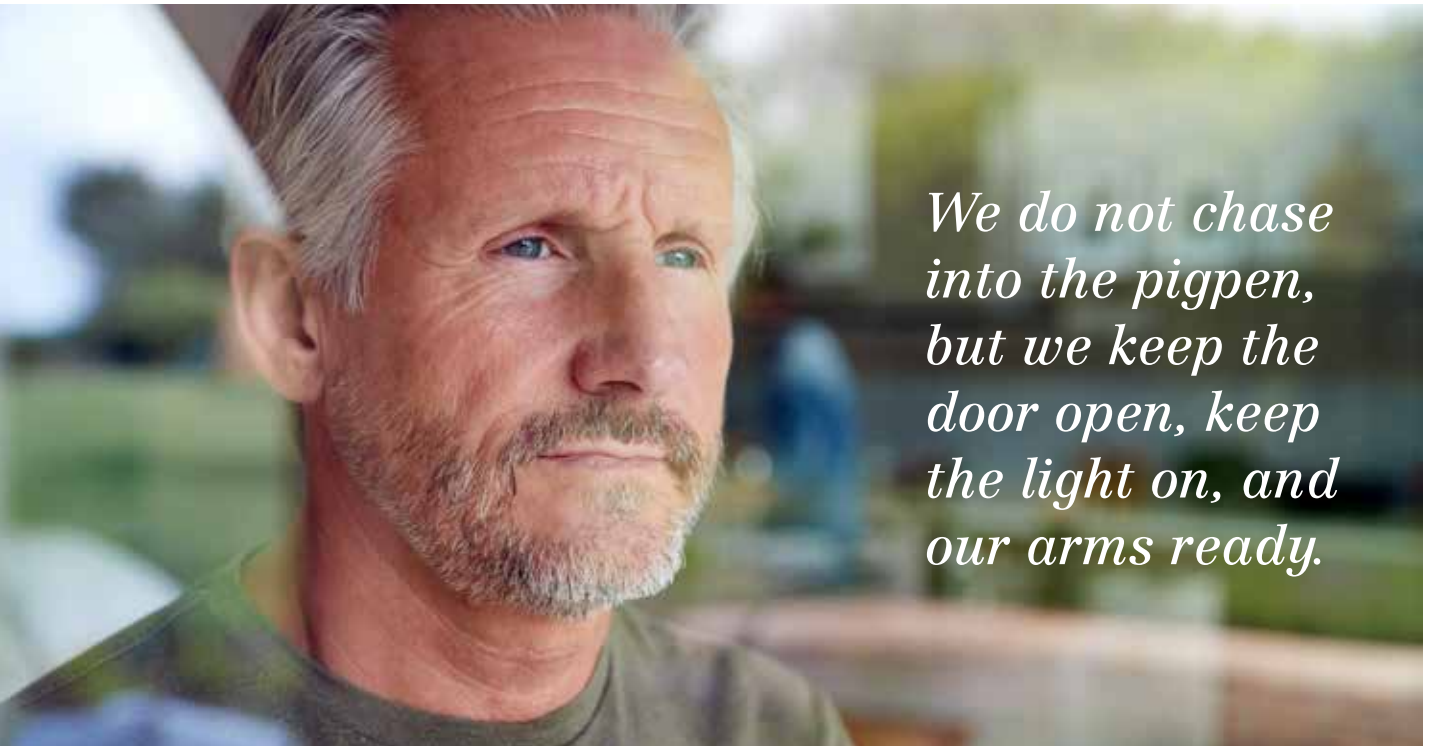
When David heard the news, he “was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: ‘O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!’” (2 Samuel 18:33). Here is a man after God’s own heart, yet even he tasted the sorrow of a broken relationship with a beloved child.

**HEAVEN’S HEARTACHE**

Lift your eyes higher still: our Father in heaven knows the ache of estranged children better than any earthly parent.

In Hosea, God laments Israel’s unfaithfulness: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from me” (Hosea 11:1, 2).

Repeatedly, God pleaded with His people to turn back, but they rejected Him for lesser love. Jesus Himself wept over Jerusalem: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37).



*We do not chase  
into the pigpen,  
but we keep the  
door open, keep  
the light on, and  
our arms ready.*

## *From the very first family, broken relationships are part of the story.*

Your Heavenly Father knows the grief of loving a child who turns away, and He never stops loving, never stops calling, never stops waiting.

### **A PARABLE OF HOPE**

Jesus did not leave us only with tragic examples. He gave us a parable that brims with hope for parents with distant children: the story of the prodigal son. A rebellious son demanded his inheritance, essentially telling his father, “I wish you were dead; I want your money, not you.” He squandered everything on reckless living and found himself starving in a pigpen.

Then the turning point: “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’” (Luke 15:17).

The young man trudged home in shame, hoping only to be a servant. But his father, who must have watched the road daily, saw him from afar and ran, humiliating himself before the village to embrace his filthy, lost son. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).

This is the heart of our God. And this is the example for weary parents. We do not chase into the pigpen, but we keep the door open, keep the light on, and our arms ready.

### **WHILE WE WAIT . . .**

What does watchful waiting look like in practice?

**Pray persistently.** Your words may not reach your child’s heart, but the Holy Spirit can. Keep bringing your child’s name before the throne of grace. Your prayers will become a healing balm for your broken heart.

**Keep the porch light on.** Stay open to reconciliation. Healthy boundaries are wise, but bitterness builds walls. Let forgiveness guard your heart.

**Confess your sins.** We all have made parenting mistakes and even sinned against our children. Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal how you have sinned against your child. Own your mistakes and confess sins the Holy Spirit reveals to you. Confessing you were wrong does not make your child, or the estrangement, right. Receive His grace and accept His forgiveness.

**Release unnecessary guilt.** Some parents carry shame for mistakes; others blame themselves for what they couldn’t control. Bring both to the cross. Jesus covers our sins and our sorrows.

**Rest in God’s love for you.** Remember: you are more than a parent—you are a beloved child of God. Your worth is not defined by a prodigal’s choices but by your Father’s unwavering love.

**Lean on spiritual family.** Don’t walk this road alone. Talk with trusted friends, a pastor, or a Christian therapist. Many carry this hidden grief; sharing it brings healing and hope.

*Remember:  
you are  
more than  
a parent—  
you are  
a beloved  
child of  
God.*

If your heart aches today for a son or daughter who is far away from you or God, remember:

Their story is not over.

Your prayers are not in vain.


God is always at work, even in places you cannot see.

Love never gives up hope.

One day, that precious line may be true for your family too: “When he came to his senses . . .” Until then, hold fast to the One who holds your child in His hands—and who never stops waiting at the door. Regardless of the choices your child makes, healing is possible for you, and God still has a purpose in your life.

#### **A PRAYER FOR YOU**

Father in heaven, today I lift up every weary parent reading these words. You know their sleepless nights and tearful prayers. Comfort them, strengthen them, and remind them they are not alone. Speak to sons and

daughters far away. Whisper truth into their hearts and draw them home. Give these parents courage to love without fear, grace to wait without bitterness, and hope that never dies. In Jesus’ name, Amen. 

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Pillemer, “Pillemer: Family Estrangement a Problem ‘Hiding in Plain Sight.’” *Cornell Chronicle*. September 10, 2020. <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2020/09/pillemer-family-estrangement-problem-hiding-plain-sight>.

<sup>2</sup> Fe Anam Avis. *PEAK: Parents of Estranged Adult Kids: A Resource for Recovery* (Magi Press, 2022), pp. 66–70.

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# MOTIVATING GOOD SELF-CARE

IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY,  
CONVENIENT, OR TASTY



SCAN FOR AUDIO

*“So do not  
fear, for I am  
with you;  
do not be  
dismayed,  
for I am your  
God. I will  
strengthen  
you and  
help you; I  
will uphold  
you with my  
righteous  
right hand.”*

*Isaiah 41:10*



A WOMAN TRAVELED with her son many miles to seek out a well-known motivational speaker. She was worried her boy was eating too much sugar. She asked the speaker, "Please, sir, tell my son to stop eating sugar."

The speaker replied, "Bring him back in two weeks." Disappointed, she took her son back home. Two weeks later they made the long journey again. This time the man said to the boy, "You must stop eating sugar. It's very bad for you." The boy had such respect for the speaker that he stopped his habit of eating sugar and chose a healthier diet instead.

The woman was confused and asked, "Why did you want me to wait two weeks to grant my request?" "Because," the speaker replied, "before I could tell your son to stop eating sugar, I had to stop eating sugar myself."

### THE MOTIVATING POWER OF PURPOSE

Upon first glance at this rather amusing story, our thoughts might be drawn to the healthful advice to stop eating a rich, sugary diet due to the detrimental effects excess sugar can have on the body, including weight gain, inflammation, type-2 diabetes, heart disease, liver damage, cognitive decline, acceleration of the aging process, and impairment to the immune system.

Take a second look, and it becomes evident that the three characters in this story each demonstrate a dedicated purpose that powers their motivation. The mother's love and concern for her son's health propelled her into self-sacrificing action. The son's great respect for the revered leader's words inspired him to make a major and lasting lifestyle change. The moral integrity of the speaker motivated him to change a personal health habit before advising others to do the same.

### I WANT TO DO RIGHT, BUT . . .

Then there's you and me, as we join Paul in asking ourselves, "Why don't I consistently do the things I know are good for me?" (See Romans 7:15–19.) The answer is complex and is influenced by our upbringing, culture, beliefs, emotions, economics, past experiences, coping skills, situational factors, stress levels, and self-care attitude.



*Our routine choices are often based on our instincts and emotions, rather than rationality and dedication to purpose.*

## *Motivation is the starting point.*

Our routine choices are often based on our instincts and emotions, rather than rationality and dedication to purpose. Thus, we find ourselves doing the opposite of what we know would be in our best interests.

- We wake up in the morning, knowing we should get up and go for a walk, run, or head to the gym, but instead we decide we'll exercise later and settle down for a few more moments of sleep. Often the busy day passes by, affording no convenient time to engage in physical fitness.
- We feel stressed and anxious. We cave to our craving for immediate comfort food—ice cream, candy bars, or chips—rather than choosing to take a relaxing walk, spend time in personal meditation and prayer, or talk things over with a good friend.
- We know we should prepare healthy meals. But cooking takes planning and preparation time, and because we're tired it's just so much easier and more convenient to dine out, order in, or grab some fast food.
- We want a nice, neat, and clean house, but it's less work to cram our excess possessions into closets and drawers or under the beds rather than making the effort to clear the clutter of unused, unneeded items.
- We often prioritize everyone else's needs and wants over our own, sometimes to the extent of neglecting our own self-care.

Can you relate to these examples? A short answer to the question of why we default to easier practices is that many of the things we know are better choices require sacrifices, behavioral change, effort, and time. When fatigued or emotionally stressed, we often seek immediate relief or comfort, which overrides rationality.

### **MOTIVATION NEEDED!**

Motivation is the starting point. It drives us to action. It fuels our healthy choices. It helps us achieve goals and success and inspires persistence even in times of challenge and doubt. It can impact our emotional and physical well-being, enabling us to thrive. But where can we find the magical elixir called *motivation*?

Motivation can be driven by internal and external forces.

Internal:

- Knowing clearly what principles guide our lives, such as honesty, integrity, and compassion
- Knowing our strengths, our passions, skills, interests, and long-term visions
- Embracing a growth mindset and viewing challenge as an opportunity for growth and learning
- Practicing gratitude and self-compassion



### External:

- Setting clear and attainable goals
- Looking for inspiration from role models and those whose journey is much like our own
- Connecting with others who share similar aspirations and growing our sources of encouragement and sense of belonging

### Practical suggestions for achieving success:


- Break down large goals into smaller steps.
- Share our goals with a trusted friend to help keep us on track.
- Don't let failure hold us back. We can learn from it and make a new start.
- Recognize that our passions and purposes may change over time.

It's important to find a purpose that resonates deeply with us personally and aligns with our authentic selves. But sometimes we still can't trust ourselves to follow through in dedicated, motivational success to pursue goals and values. Heaven stands ready to help.

*Heaven stands ready to help.*

### MAKE A GOD BOX.

A God Box can be a lidded box you have decorated or one that is unique and special. It's a project you may enjoy sharing with friends and family, or keep it just between you and your heavenly Father.

Into that box, place your written dreams and goals, your worries and fears, the challenges you are facing, and the gratitude you feel for successes and progress. Find and write down promises from the Bible that encourage you and bring you peace. Pray over each item you place in your God Box and watch the unexpected and wonderful ways in which you are blessed and helped all along life's challenging journey. 

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# HOPE BEYOND DEPRESSION

HEALING COMES WITH PATIENCE



SCAN FOR AUDIO



*God hears  
the prayers  
of those  
who plead  
on our  
behalf and  
comes to  
our aid.*

EVERYONE AT SOME POINT in their lives suffers with depression because of life events. The depression may last for a few hours, a day, or even a few days. Depression that lasts for many days or weeks, however, is cause for concern.

Depression has been described as a common mental disorder, characterized by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, hopelessness, disturbed sleep or appetite, feelings of tiredness, low energy, and poor concentration.<sup>1</sup> Women are twice as likely to suffer depression as men.<sup>2</sup>

My journey with depression began in 1996. A year seemingly no different from any other year in my life, with its share of challenges, joys, and sorrows. Except it was the year I would tumble into a dark place.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

Here are the most important lessons I have learned from my journey:

- If you are depressed for a prolonged period, get help.
  - Don't rule out medication. Medication can break the wall of darkness that surrounds you, and this breakthrough will give you the strength you need to make some lifestyle changes that could assist your recovery.
  - Find a good doctor, someone who is highly recommended.
  - Share your struggle with someone and ask them to pray for you.

- If, like me, your depression is a life struggle, feed on the Word of God. Read and memorize "joy" passages, such as Nehemiah 8:10; Psalms 34, 40, and 66; and the book of Philippians.
- Begin a Joy Journal, where you give God thanks for five things each night before you go to sleep.
- Feed your mind with good things (Philippians 4:8).

#### A TRAGIC LOSS

It all began in 1985 when I lost my firstborn son, Joseph, Jr., at the age of 4. One bright and beautiful Caribbean Sunday morning Joey, as we affectionately called him, was attacked by a dog and died in the hospital within hours of the attack. That day life changed for my husband, Joe, and me. We walked "through the valley of the shadow of death," but it was also during that difficult time that Joe and I formed a true and lasting relationship with Jesus Christ for the first time in our lives.

#### THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Eleven years later, however, a series of events occurred that reached into my memories of Joey's death and triggered my depression. It was a year I will never forget. My bottle of pain tablets looked so enticing and seemed to promise peace and an end to my emotional and physical pain. When I attempted to take the tablets, my husband found me at just the right time, God's perfect time. My husband is the one who gently but firmly suggested I seek help, and I did. That was the beginning of a new journey, my journey to joy in Jesus.



## *Because I have lived it I know it is true: God gave me back my joy.*

Two things were most important in my recovery. The first was to get the right medication to relieve the sadness that engulfed my life. Until that sadness lifted, I was unable to motivate myself to exercise, eat right, pray, read my Bible, or even make the good choices that would help me recover. After a period of six to eight weeks on medication, the darkness began to lift. It was like walking out of a dark room into the bright sunshine. Everything looked bright and hopeful.

Finding a good doctor was the second most important thing in my recovery. A psychiatrist told me, "For every period of high in your life there will be a corresponding low period." She warned me not to take it seriously, that it would pass, and that during that time I should not do things such as shopping or making major decisions. I have taken that advice seriously, and I feel better prepared for those low periods when they come.

Once the darkness lifted I was able to turn to my Bible again, and there I found my strength in rejoicing in God. During my depression, when I had no desire to read the Word, and my only words to my Father in heaven were cries of help, others were interceding on my behalf. That's why I tell my friends, "When you feel depressed or discouraged and cannot pray, reach out to someone and ask them to pray for you." God hears the prayers of those who plead on our behalf and comes to our aid. I know this to be true.

Has my depression gone away? Not quite, even with medication. As with many other people, my struggle with depression is complicated by a lifelong struggle with chronic pain, which, combined with fatigue, at times overrides my medication and results in depressive episodes. As a Christian, however, I know there will be an end, and I know there is hope.

### **GETTING BACK THE JOY**

Now here comes the cliché statement that some may choose to disregard. But because I have lived it I know it is true: God gave me back my joy. I don't mean the laughter and happy feelings; I mean a state of mind that gives me hope, even when I'm sad.

During this journey I have received much unsolicited advice, which has been both interesting and frustrating. Some well-meaning soul would advise me to read my Bible more, pray more, praise more, even sing my way out of depression. I tried, but it didn't work. Some days I could not pray, and life seemed so hopeless, empty, and dark. Could they not understand how I felt?


### **LIFE HAPPENS**

With all the information available, the Christian community is still not very good at dealing with those of us who are depressed. We immediately assume depressed persons have a weak Christian experience or no connection to God. We assume that the problem of the mind is a problem of the heart; and in some cases that may be true. With my own limited experience in talking with believers from different countries, cultures, and backgrounds, however, I've found that the cause is usually an event or a series of events that happen in our lives.

The stigma attached to depression in the church must be removed, but to do so we need to educate our church members about mental illness. As I travel the globe I share my journey with depression with others and tell them of God's gift of strength and joy. I do this because I believe that each trial is a testimony to the goodness of God in our lives. Paul writes that God "comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 Corinthians 1:4).

*As I travel the globe I share my journey with depression with others and tell them of God's gift of strength and joy.*

### DAYS, MONTHS, YEARS

I remember the day after Joey died. I found myself searching my Bible for words of comfort and hope. Yet all I could find were verses that talked about joy and rejoicing, praise and gladness. I was in no mood then to read about those things. My heart was breaking, and I wanted peace and comfort. But God knew that 11 years after my son died, I would need to know that word *joy*. 

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression>

<sup>2</sup> <https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Fbul0000102>

**Heather-Dawn Small**, a longtime Seventh-day Adventist women's leader and advocate, died on January 2, 2024, from cancer. She was 66. Statistics in this article have been updated since it was published in the *Adventist Review* on January 3, 2016, at <https://adventistreview.org/magazine-article/hope-beyond-depression/>. At that time, Heather-Dawn was director of Women's Ministries for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.



# ESHET CHAYIL: WOMAN OF VALOR



SCAN FOR AUDIO

## LIVING WITH COURAGE AND GRACE

WE HAD A SEMINAR at church where the pastor discussed parenting. He quoted: “The king upon his throne has no higher work than has the mother. The mother is queen of her household. . . . Her work is for time and for eternity” (*Adventist Home*, p. 231).

As I sat there, my mind traveled back 28 years. During my university days, I eagerly read many books by Ellen White and was deeply inspired by her counsel. Her writings challenged me to think carefully about my goals and values. As I sought to apply her principles, I realized the importance of balancing spiritual convictions with academic and personal growth. Although my path changed and I didn’t become a concert pianist, the experience shaped my life in meaningful and lasting ways.

So I decided to be a good wife and mother and to support my husband. I had consciously said “no” to a career of my own. I was convinced that this was the right thing to do. I had always wanted to do something for God, and since my husband was a pastor, I thought I could serve God alongside him. I completed my teaching degree but never worked as a teacher.

My mother Hilka had been a housewife all her life. She once wanted to build a business, but at that time, the wives of church employees were not allowed to work outside the home. When I married a pastor, the church still didn’t like to see women working. I focused on helping my husband and taking care of our home and our four children. When we received a call to work in Africa, I was delighted. We served six years there. We loved being in the ministry. I did not feel that I was missing out on anything in my life. I had been a useful member of the team.



*I was not going to become a concert pianist after all.*

When my youngest daughter started kindergarten, we parents were asked, "What is your greatest wish?" Mine: six months on a desert island so I could write a book, learn to paint, practice piano, and do crafts. I had always put God's work first, but felt I never had time to do what I really wanted to do for myself. I felt housebound and restless.

I wasn't sure anymore that I had made the right decision. More women had careers. I was "just" a housewife. When people asked, "What do you do?" I sheepishly answered that I was a housewife and mother. It hurt.

#### **MID-LIFE CRISIS**

I realized I was in a mid-life crisis. I had always been an optimistic and happy person. Now I no longer recognized myself. I was physically and emotionally exhausted. I confided in my sister that I no longer had the energy to play the piano. "But that's your soul," she exclaimed. "What happened to you?"

I decided to do something for myself and got a music school job. Two years later we moved again, and I had to give it up, but it felt good to have a paying job.

Somewhere along the way I thought Ellen White had deceived me. Of course, she hadn't. She only said the mother's task was more important than the king's. She had not promised we would be rewarded and recognized for this work. Our problem is that we think work has no value if not measured in money.

Now my children are grown. I know God guided me and that what I did was valuable. I don't have to compare myself with others. As our children grew, I was drawn to women's ministries and evangelism. This enriched my life.

My mother had always served the church. She directed choirs, taught crafts, led meetings, played piano and organ. She often said, "We can't earn salvation with good deeds anyhow." I followed her footsteps. The reward is the joy of service, not recognition.



## *If such a perfect woman hardly exists, why feel guilty for not being her?*

I encourage women to follow their own paths with confidence and independence. My daughters have built meaningful careers, reflecting the opportunities available to women today. In this changing world, it's wise to develop both purpose and financial stability—so that a lifetime of service can lead to a secure and fulfilling retirement.

### **THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN WIFE**


In traditional Jewish homes, the wife prepares for Shabbat and lights candles, while the husband recites Proverbs 31. I'm sure the praise is deserved, but among the praises are hidden expectations. To be a good wife, women feel they must conform to a list of skills and character qualities. Who wants to be compared to the perfect woman?

As Christians, we also hear sermons on Proverbs 31 on various occasions. If such a perfect woman hardly exists, why feel guilty for not being her? The passage describes a strong, multitasking woman—real estate, manufacturing, household management, wisdom, and generosity. Excellent qualities, but why should worth be measured by accomplishments?

Proverbs 31 is a poem about the *eshet chayil*, the courageous woman. The Hebrew is closer to a heroic song celebrating the deeds of a warrior. It is not a to-do list but a poetic ideal.

At creation, we read about *ezer k'gnedo*—a suitable helper. Rabbis explain this phrase with the image of two posts leaning against each other, both bearing the same weight. They stay standing only because they are of equal strength. Husband and wife are of equal value because they support each other.

No matter what a woman does or doesn't do, she is worthy of praise for the blessing she brings to her family through her energy and creativity. Every woman can do that in her own unique way. Each of us has our gifts and abilities, and that is good.

The title *eshet chayil* is a blessing, not earned but given without preconditions. It is an encouragement like our "Go for it! You can do it!" High five, *eshet chayil!* You're a brave woman. 

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*Hannele Ottshofski is a native of Finland and spent most of her life as a pastor's wife in Germany. This article is excerpted from her book Tired of Waiting: Women in Church and Society.*





# YOU'RE NEVER ALL ALONE!

**GOD WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU**

Do you ever feel lonely? If you do, when do you feel most lonely?  
And when are you happy to be alone?



**GOD IS ALWAYS WITH US!**

God will never leave you because He loves you so much! Read the following verses about God being with you all the time. Make a list of all the ways God's love helps you to feel better when you feel lonely.

- Deuteronomy 31:8
- Joshua 1:9
- Psalm 23:4
- Isaiah 41:10
- Isaiah 41:13
- Isaiah 43:2
- Matthew 28:20
- Philippians 4:6, 7



## READY REMINDER

Choose something to remind you that God is always with you. You could:

- Make a heart shape with your hands.
- Put your hand on your chest.
- Create a small heart-shaped object to tie on your school bag or pin inside a pocket.



**SHARE GOD'S LOVE**

Choose your favorite Bible verse about God's loving closeness. Write it on a card, decorate it, and send it to someone lonely.



SCAN FOR AUDIO



## EVERYONE FEELS LONELY SOMETIMES

Did you know it's normal to feel lonely sometimes? Jesus felt lonely too. Can you find stories in the Bible about Jesus feeling lonely?



## LONELY DAVID

Even David was lonely at times. Read Psalm 25 (especially verse 16) and Psalm 142 in a modern version of the Bible. What do you think David was feeling when he was alone? What feelings do you have when you are alone? Sad, quiet, contented, discouraged, afraid?

Write your own psalm about a lonely experience and end by praising God for being with you all the time.

## BE STILL WITH GOD

It is good to be quiet and alone for a while. Think about how much God loves you. His love for you is bigger than anything you can imagine! He enjoyed creating you! He likes you very much, and He is very, very pleased with you. Yes, you!

Wrap your arms around yourself in a big hug from God! He is always with you. You are never really alone.

Ask God what you can do to help others. Maybe there is someone else who is lonely whom God would like you to befriend.



## UNUSUAL FRIENDS

The Bible tells stories of people who could have been lonely, but God sent them a very special friend—someone surprising. Read their stories and find out how they helped each other. Maybe God will give you an unexpected friend to bless your life too!

- Naaman's maid and her rich employer (2 Kings 5:1–19)
- Elijah and a poor foreign widow from Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7–24)
- Naomi and her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth (Ruth 1–4)
- David and Jonathan, even when Jonathan's father, Saul, wanted to hurt David (1 Samuel 19:1–7)
- David and Mephibosheth, a king and a man with a disability (2 Samuel 9:1–13)
- The woman at the well and Jesus, the Messiah (John 4:1–26)
- Hadassah, an orphan girl, and her cousin, Mordecai, who worked for the king (Esther 2:5–7)
- Paul and Onesimus, a runaway slave (Philemon)

During family worship, act out the stories of lonely people in the Bible and see if you can guess each other's stories.



Being alone doesn't have to be sad and boring. List some activities that are fun to do on your own, then collect some things to help you. Here are some ideas:

- Write a letter or card to send to a lonely family member.
- Search for one small object beginning with each letter of the alphabet or each letter in your name.
- Set a timer for 30 minutes and see how fast you can tidy your room. See if you can beat the clock!
- Stack paper cups, stones, or twigs and see how high you can build a tower.


- Cut pictures from old magazines and make a collage of your favorite things.
- Read a book and write a summary of the story in fewer than 100 words.
- Make a treat for your family, such as fruit salad.
- Make healthy candies. Mix equal amounts of smooth nut butter and clear honey, then add milk powder, coconut flour, or ground almonds and knead everything together until the mixture is stiff. Shape into balls and roll in chopped nuts, grated chocolate, cocoa powder, or cinnamon.
- Create something to help your family celebrate Sabbath this week. Craft a candle holder, pick flowers, plan a special worship time, organize a treasure hunt, or help your parents prepare Sabbath dessert.
- Do something to make a lonely person happy—give them a picture you drew, a story you wrote, or cookies you baked.
- Make a scrapbook of your favorite Bible verses and decorate each verse in a beautiful way.
- Plan a fun way to tell your Sabbath School lesson story to your family.
- Use an old box to make a Bible-time house. Find out what would be in the house and make models of the furniture and other things from scraps and old boxes. Or build a Bible home with wooden bricks or construction sets. Use it to tell a Bible story that takes place in a house.

## A VERY SPECIAL CHURCH

Peter and Polly arrived at their new church. It was a small church without any other children. Almost everyone was old enough to be their grandparent. Polly sighed. She was hoping for a new friend. But everyone was so happy to have children in their church! They wanted to do everything they could to make church special for Peter and Polly. Peter liked to read the Bible during the church service. Polly liked to help Mommy arrange the flowers and set out drinks and snacks after the service.

Sometimes Peter and Polly made little things to give to everyone at church. They made cookies, baked bread rolls, decorated cards and bookmarks, and tied small bunches of flowers. Sometimes the older people brought little surprises for Peter and Polly: home-baked cakes, candies, books, and knitted sweaters and scarves when winter came.

Peter and Polly's parents took the children to visit each of the older people. They recorded amazing stories from their lives and turned them into a little book. Peter learned how to make videos of their stories to show in church. Sometimes everyone in the church would join their Sabbath School class, sing their songs, listen to their stories, and help make crafts.

Polly and Peter learned how fun it was to have older friends too! 

***Karen Holford** travels alone in her role as Family and Children's Ministries director in the Trans-European Division. She enjoys the quiet time to write, read books, and embroider pictures of nature. Whenever being alone is a little scary, she gives herself a big hug from God and she soon feels better again!*

## *Northern Asia-Pacific Division*

Pastors' wives in Sri Lanka enjoyed a short retreat together in September 2025. It was a blessing, and they were able to enjoy Korean face masks for the first time. The following is a pictorial report.





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