

America is in the midst of a crisis. A crisis that has impacted millions of us, and even cost some their very lives. Whether through ignorance or apathy, this crisis continues to spread and at times it seems like there is no way out. It seems as if we are doomed to adjust permanently to what it will mean to live under this “new normal” that has been caused by this crisis.

I’m speaking of course about the crisis of loneliness. Sociologists and researchers have been declaring that America is in the midst of a “loneliness epidemic,” with more than three out of five Americans reporting that they feel lonely. This loneliness is described as feeling isolated, not understood, left out, lacking companionship.

Both men and women are within 5 percentage points of each other when it comes to loneliness, though men suffer at slightly higher rates than women.

It can be easy to blame 2020 for this epidemic of loneliness, as we have all been more isolated from each other and had less opportunity to see other people. But, these statistics are actually from 2019, pre-pandemic, and indicated a 13% increase from 2018! The numbers are not getting better, and the events of this year have only exposed our deep loneliness as a nation. To quote the Preacher from Ecclesiastes, there is nothing new under the sun. This has been a problem before and will continue to be even when 2020 is only a distant memory that we think of as a cold chill runs down our spine.

This loneliness epidemic seems strange, as we are more connected than ever before. Consider that in no other time in history did as many people have the ability to connect with as many other people at the same time, instantaneously. Through computers, smartphones, and other devices, we are constantly connected to other people and the outside world, yet we are still growing more lonely by the day.

Some of the numbers:

- Americans on average spend 5.4 hours a day on their phones. Millennials spend 5.7, boomers spend 5.
- Average of 10 hours and 39 minutes of screen time every day (including everything).
- Over half of Gen Z spends around 13 hours/day on their phones
- 73% of heavy social media users feel lonely, and Gen Z has the highest rate of loneliness overall at almost 80%.

All of these statistics are meant to illustrate one thing: we live in a culture that is more connected than ever before, but most of us would say that very few people, if any, actually *know* us. We have sacrificed the depth of knowing other people, and being known ourselves, on the altar of cheap connection easily accessed by scrolling through our phones. Even though we are connected, we are lonely, and we don’t feel known.

The human desire to be known is not new. It has been around since the beginning, and every human being from the dawn of time has felt, deep in their soul, the desire for someone to *know* them. What many don't understand is that this desire is from God himself.

The passage we are going to go through is long, but we are going to read the whole thing. It is the familiar story of the Samaritan woman at the well, and her interaction with Jesus. As we do, I want you to put yourself in the place of the Samaritan woman, and think about what you learn about Jesus from this story. Let's read together from John 4, starting in verse 1.

John 4:1-30

4 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John **2** (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), **3** he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. **4** And he had to pass through Samaria. **5** So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6** Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." **8** (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) **9** The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) **10** Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." **11** The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? **12** Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." **13** Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, **14** but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." **15** The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." **17** The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; **18** for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." **19** The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. **20** Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." **21** Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. **22** You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23** But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. **24** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." **25** The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." **26** Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

27 Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” **28** So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, **29** “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” **30** They went out of the town and were coming to him.

This woman had three strikes against her:

1. Woman
2. Samaritan
3. Her sin

Two things:

1. Jesus uses her temporal need to point to her spiritual need
2. The woman’s point of praise to Jesus was that he knew her completely yet still offered her living water

The woman came to the well for water but Jesus uses her need for water to illustrate her need for salvation. He shows her that even though her physical need for water was very real, she would just have to come back again and again. However, her true, eternal need was for living water, which Jesus says that he can give her.

The second thing, look at the woman’s point of praise for Jesus. What does she say to the people in the village? She says “come see a man who told me all that I ever did.” What fulfillment, joy and praise can come from recognizing that Jesus knows everything you have ever done or thought, and yet loves you and offers you the living water of salvation despite knowing you.

Two application points:

1. Is your loneliness the temporal need that God is using to draw you into a relationship with Jesus?
2. Are you hiding behind fake authenticity in order to keep from being known by others and more importantly, by God?

When Jesus left earth he gave us two things. The Holy Spirit and the Church.

Matthew 16:13-18

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” **14** And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” **15** He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” **16** Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” **17** And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. **18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Throughout Scripture, we see spiritual growth primarily occurring in the context of community. Community is vitally important to a Christian becoming more like Jesus. We are not in this alone.

Yet, our culture has trained us to hide behind fake excuses for authenticity and connection, driving us further and further into the depths of loneliness and despair as we continue to chase the promise of connection.

“To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.” - Timothy Keller

Once you meet Jesus, you lose the need to keep going back to the well.