

SEQUOYAH HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Titus: Send a Postcard”

Rev. Ben Garris

Titus 3:12-15 | 1 Kings 19:14-18

June 30, 2024

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Grace be with all of you.

If you were Titus, and you were left on Crete, (remember Ch.1 v.5? *“I left you behind in Crete”*) and you had this mission/expectation to correct the leadership of the Church there, to rebuke immoral behaviors, to encourage them to do the good works of God, and to behave like people who are claimed by the grace, mercy, and goodness of God, would that feel overwhelming? Would that feel like you’re all alone in this work? I wouldn’t be chomping at the bit to go among the “liars, vicious brutes, and lazy gluttons” and expect them to listen to me. What I want to put forward today is that all too often we can FEEL as though we are completely alone in a task God has called us to do or in a ministry we are working for. How many of you have ever felt that feeling of being alone, having no one else present either physically, emotionally, or spiritually? Have you felt like Elijah when he was running from Jezebel and he just wanted the Lord to take his life and he exclaimed, “I alone am left”?

A mental health crisis can occur whenever we think we are alone. Studies done on “why people commit suicide” show that some people do so because they feel trapped, hopeless, and alone. That is, they feel they have nowhere to go. They feel they have nothing to live for, and they feel they have nobody to feel what they are feeling. Moreover, there is a reason, even in the prison system, why **solitary confinement** is the hardest form of punishment, because it is a mental punishment, and it is extremely challenging to be left on one’s own especially for a long period of time.

What have been your experiences with loneliness? The COVID-19 pandemic forced isolation upon every one of us. A 2024 global survey showed that 33% of adults felt lonely. A study by the American Council of Life Insurance (I couldn't find the year of the study) reported that the most lonely group in America are college students. Next on the list are divorced people, welfare recipients, single mothers, rural students, housewives, and the elderly as well as those with disabilities. I would be curious what effects technology has had on us? What is it like to be connected with hundreds of people but only at surface level, vs. having meaningful relationships? A 2023 article by Cross River Therapy shared that 52% of Americans feel lonely and 47% of others report their relationships are NOT meaningful. Additionally, whether single or not, 57% report eating every meal alone. 73% of Millennials reported feeling lonely. Statistics show that those who attend religious services regularly are less lonely than those who attend only a few times a year or not at all, so keep coming! Still, the same article noted that of those who do attend, most are older than the Millennial generation, and of the number of people who do attend religious gatherings, those who attend monthly or weekly is under 50%. Our planet's population has never been greater in number than it is now (8 billion now I believe) and yet we are a lonely people.

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You hear it differently now, don't you? It matters when you are known by others. It psychologically matters to have others intentionally think about you and care about you, doesn't it? Whatever you're going through today, you are not alone, and if you feel that you are, call any one of us Pastors, Elders, Deacons, Stephen Ministers and we will be there for you. Be encouraged, keep going, keep working, continue the good deeds God has called you to do knowing that you are not alone.

We have taken it upon ourselves to change this building so that more people, different people, no doubt lonely people with no place to call their own worshipping community, may find joy in the fellowship of the Spirit. Our strength comes not from doing anything on our own or thinking that “I alone am left,” but our individual resolve is strengthened when we stand side by side with one another in faith, in hope, and in love that we may continue to do the good deeds which God is calling each of us to do.

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Titus was left behind on Crete with the large task of transforming Cretans into Christians, but he was not alone. We are here in Knoxville to invite Knox-villains into a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ, and we are not alone in our task. Let us not grow weary in our call and in our work and give thanks for our Christian brothers and sisters beside us. Let us be girded with the presence of Almighty God, who time and time again speaks the refrain “I will be with you.” Let

us remember there is nowhere in all of creation we can go that God's presence will be unable to accompany us because the Christian God is the only God that has decided to dwell within people, that we can say as Jesus did, "*I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*"

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SEQUOYAH HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Titus: Send a Postcard”

Rev. Ben Garris

Titus 3:12-15 | 1 Kings 19:14-18

June 30, 2024

We’re finishing our series on the letter to Titus today. We’ve been reminded by the writer that God never lies, that the God of Jesus Christ is faithful and trustworthy and true, and that Titus was left behind on Crete to affect change in the church and the leadership there. We heard last week that the saving work of God extends even to the Cretans, not on any works of righteousness they had done, but because of God’s mercy, therefore they were to avoid meaningless controversies and focus on the gospel message and the good deeds to be done.

Titus 3:12-15

When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Make every effort to send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way, and see that they lack nothing. And let people learn to devote themselves to good works in order to meet urgent needs, so that they may not be unproductive.

All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith.

Grace be with all of you.

If you were Titus, and you were left on Crete, (remember Ch.1 v.5? “I left you behind in Crete” and you had this mission/expectation to correct the leadership of the Church there, to rebuke immoral behaviors, to encourage them to do the good works of God, and to behave like people who are claimed by the grace, mercy, and goodness of God, would that feel overwhelming? Would that feel like you’re all alone in this work? I wouldn’t be chomping at the bit to go among the “liars, vicious brutes, and lazy gluttons” and expect them to listen to me. What I want to put forward today is that all too often we can FEEL as though we are completely alone in a task God has called us to do or in a ministry we are working for. How many of you have ever felt that feeling of being alone, having no one else present either physically, emotionally, or spiritually? Have you felt like Elijah when he was running from Jezebel and he just wanted the Lord to take his life and he exclaimed, “I alone am left”?

A mental health crisis can occur whenever we think we are alone. Studies done on “why people commit suicide” show that some people do so because they feel trapped, hopeless, and alone. That is, they feel they have nowhere to go. They feel they have nothing to live for, and they feel they have nobody to feel what they are feeling. Moreover, there is a reason, even in the prison system, why **solitary confinement** is the hardest form of punishment, because it is a mental punishment, and it is extremely challenging to be left on one’s own especially for a long period of time.

What have been your experiences with loneliness? The COVID-19 pandemic forced isolation upon every one of us. A 2024 global survey showed that 33% of adults felt lonely. A study by the American Council of Life Insurance (I couldn't find the year of the study) reported that the most lonely group in America are college students. Next on the list are divorced people, welfare recipients, single mothers, rural students, housewives, and the elderly as well as those with disabilities. I would be curious what effects technology has had on us? What is it like to be connected with hundreds of people but only at surface level, vs. having meaningful relationships? A 2023 article by Cross River Therapy shared that 52% of Americans feel lonely and 47% of others report their relationships are NOT meaningful. Additionally, whether single or not, 57% report eating every meal alone. 73% of Millennials reported feeling lonely. Statistics show that those who attend religious services regularly are less lonely than those who attend only a few times a year or not at all, so keep coming! Still, the same article noted that of those who do attend, most are older than the Millennial generation, and of the number of people who do attend religious gatherings, those who attend monthly or weekly is under 50%. Our planet's population has never been greater in number than it is now (8 billion now I believe) and yet we are a lonely people.

If you're quite puzzled right now why I'm sharing all of this, it is because I wanted to bring your attention to a very important observation within the closing of the letter to Titus.

See, it is so easy to read right over the names of Artemas and Tychicus, Zenas and Apollos who were involved in this ministry effort for the church on Crete. How many times have you read your Bible and skipped over the opening greetings, or the closing remarks of letters, or lists of names and genealogies and thought something like, "I don't need to read that part, what value could it have for me? That just has to be included in our reading because it was in the letter." I know I have done that many times.

Yes, this is a letter addressed to Titus, but this closing reminds him that he does not work alone. God has not left him to figure it out all by himself. God has put the Holy Spirit in co-workers to aid him. Names of people that WE do not know, but that Titus would have known are shared in this letter. Titus might have been left behind on Crete, but he is not left alone, and the very last verse says, ALL WHO ARE WITH ME send greetings to you. Titus is reminded that there is an assembly of Christians who are working together even if they are geographically separated.

Friends, no matter your experience with loneliness, hear this good news: you are not alone. God will never leave you nor forsake you. God has put the Holy Spirit in other people as well, to create community and to aid you in your work. To aid you in the journey of faith. What effect does this have on you to know that you're not alone? When Elijah thought he was the only one left and all alone, God said, "*I have seven thousand in Israel who have not bowed their knees to Baal.*" It is following that reassurance that Elisha becomes a servant of Elijah.

One could argue that the Son of God, Jesus, of all the humans to live, would feel the loneliest because what other human could relate to his specific work and mission? Still Jesus never believed he was alone even when his disciples deserted him, **John 16:32**, "*Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.*" How might your perspective each day change if

you live in conversation and reliance upon God? What might your life be like if you spent 10 minutes of your screentime with God instead? What if I challenged you to get to know someone different here at SHPC, would you do it? What if I challenged those viewing on-line to meet us in person if you're physically able?

SHPC supports financially, prayerfully, and emotionally 12 missionaries all over the globe. One of the things we do is to write a card for Christmas, Easter, and their Birthday. You might be quick to think that has little impact, but there is power and encouragement in knowing that you are not alone. That you're not forgotten. That you have brothers and sisters in Christ praying for you, supporting your mission needs, and who want to hear from you and visit with you if/when possible. Have you ever received a postcard in the mail? How does that make you feel? It requires more intention and time on the sender than the convenience of sending a text message. How about you choose someone to send a postcard to this week? Choose a nice postcard design, hand-write your thoughts, stamp it and mail it snail-mail. I bet you will make their day when they realize someone out in this big world took the time to think of them in that way. Don't do it because of a birthday or anniversary either. Just send a postcard to someone who matters to you and give a word of encouragement. Raise your hand if you'll do that this week? Perhaps hear these closing words to Titus now as if you had composed a postcard to one of our own missionaries instead, and suppose you closed it with:

“When I send Mark Lampley to you, or Mary-Emily, do your best to come to me at Sequoyah Hills, for I have decided to spend the winter there. ¹³ Make every effort to send Kenan the lawyer and Skoog on their way and see that they lack nothing. ¹⁴ And let people learn to devote themselves to good works in order to meet urgent needs, so that they may not be unproductive. ¹⁵ All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with all of you.”

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