

The Danger of Isolation

A Cord of Three Strands

“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Ecclesiastes 4:12.

“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary [enemy], the devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour [destroy]” (NIV, Interpretation added). 1 Peter 5:8



What a powerful analogy warning us that there is an enemy that seeks to destroy us at every turn. He prowls and sneaks through the high grasses waiting for an opportunity when his prey is unaware. He waits for the one who is so engrossed by his own life and unaware that much exists beyond his own selfish desires.

This word “sober” means to have a perspective that is not distorted or out of focus. It is characterized by reason, sanity, self-control, and the state of being emotionally balanced. To be vigilant is to be watching—especially watching your step, so that each step is firm and well placed. Sobriety and vigilance is proceeding in a wakeful state. It is a continual action of staying watchful and alert to danger or trouble. Not in an anxious way, but in a way that is securely focused.

Verse 5, 6 and 9 of First Peter 5, which were not included above, gives us more insight. In verse 5 we are instructed to **submit to one another**. Verse 6 instructs us to **humble ourselves under God’s hand** and to **cast our cares upon him**. Verse 9 instructs us to **resist the devil** and to be **steadfast in the faith**. For us to be sober we must keep our eyes on the Shepherd who watches over us. We depend on him to warn us of, and protect us from impending danger. We are also to take wise counsel from elders, who walk with us, and are there to instruct us along the Way.

Isolation Stunts Spiritual Growth and Opens Us Up to Spiritual Attack

Paul stated in Romans 7:21, “I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me [Lit. Evil lies close at hand]. In Genesis 4:7 God said to Cain, “Sin is crouching at your door, it desires to have you, but you must master it.” In other words, sin is waiting to ambush you. You must be master over sin—not the other way around. This means we must walk with our spiritual eyes open—keeping in step with the Spirit of God. Of a truly spiritual man it is said, “His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2). His focus is toward the Lord not sin--selfishness (see Romans 8). All this is to say that sin, evil, and the devil are present—be on your guard—and stay close to the Lord as you walk along the Way.

The Dilemma

Isolation is a major dilemma facing God's people today. Many have become emotionally and relationally cut-off from others. Everyone seems to be leading busy lives yet often we are not connected to others for any deep purpose. When we are under pressure, or our relationships are suffering, or life has too many unpleasant surprises. During these times we might be tempted to keep our suffering to ourselves.

Isolation is more than just not having someone to talk with. Isolation weakens our defenses. We often forget that we are in a spiritual battle every day. It is a war for our spiritual well-being, our effectiveness for God, and our impact on those closest to us. Isolation from others is deadly.

It is Important to Distinguish Between Isolation and Solitude.



With solitude there is an understanding that we are never alone—God is always with us. Solitude can be refreshing and helpful for us to rest or find a solution for a problem. It is a place that we can rest and is based on faith.

It is not to be confused with isolation which doesn't involve rest or faith, but involves hiding problems and then worrying about problems. Isolation is designed to help one hide and push everyone else away—including God. We may be trying to resolve a problem—but with isolation it is always on our own terms.

What Triggers Isolation?

Following is a list of triggers a group of men recently gave me when I asked them what makes them want to isolate from other people: Sickness, hurt feelings, confusion, fears, embarrassment, confrontation, loneliness, shame, anger, control, disrespect, inferiority, criticism, and boredom. What might you add to the list?

Each one of these triggers carries with it pain that is believed cannot be shared with someone else, but must be suffered through alone. We learn to respond to these triggers in habitual ways that we have learned in the past when we were immature or intoxicated by the world. Often we are not aware that we isolate from others, or what has led us to do so.

How I Learned to Isolate: A Story From the Past

When I was a young child I saw the conflict, anger, and violence within my family. Being the youngest of 3 boys—six years apart from my next brother and 9 years apart from my oldest brother, I learned to hide in the corner to escape the pain. I learned if I would hide there I would be safe and possibly not be seen. The problem was that it was still

painful—and full of fear. This all gave way to a deep loneliness. To help me with my loneliness and fear I began to take those things which would comfort me into my hiding place in the corner. It would have been nice if it were a soft blanket, unfortunately, the things I took in, like porn, then later—cigarettes, then later—alcohol, and eventually -- drugs, were not helpful. These addictive substitutes only lead me to retreat further away from people and deeper into my pain. Add to all of this a lot of anger that I had no clue how to manage—it only frightened me and disgusted me. I tried to hide the anger, but it would build up and explode on someone—usually one of my peers who would say or do the wrong thing in my mind or just get too close. I was afraid they might really see me. But in the corner no one really saw me or knew who I was—so I thought. I was hiding behind the wall of isolation—driven there by many of the things in the list above.

Loneliness: A Major Epidemic in our Society.



Loneliness is a powerful trigger toward isolation, and often leads toward risky behavior. A well known politician was recently on the news. He confessed to having an affair with a woman living in another country. As he proceeded to tell the story he shared how the relationship began innocently enough as they chatted online about daily events. He found himself becoming more attached as he would advise the woman on how to overcome some personal issues in her life. Their emotional attachment continued to grow over many years until they decided to meet one day, which led to a physical affair.

I found it interesting as the man told his story that a key statement indicated that he had difficulty trusting those around him. He stated “I can’t let my guard down with anyone.” He bought into the lie that there was no one close to him he could trust—not his family, his wife, his friends, his colleagues, or his God. He began to isolate himself over an 8 year period of time, moving further and further down the path of destruction. Although he was intoxicated by isolation and the fantasy, he had to know where it would lead—yet he continued down the path anyway—until he couldn’t turn around. He thought no one could see him. How could they? He was behind the wall of isolation. But like with Adam and Eve, God knew exactly where he was—and God intervened and revealed the lie. Do we really think we can hide from the watchful eye of the Lord? To think so is the very definition of insanity.

Commit to Ending Relational and Emotional Isolation

As the enemy of our souls roars and throws the bait into our path, we learn to step over—being obedient to the word of truth within us. We learn to live like we really are in Christ. As we saw in verse 9 of First Peter 3, we are to learn to take our stand in faith with our feet planted—not moved by the insanity around us. Trusting God—standing in

his rest and peace, even when the storm rages around us. We learn not to step in the rage as it roars. We learn to let God be in control. We learn to trust him to be God.

Our enemy has gone before us preparing the bait to move us toward the trap. Just as a hunter guides his prey down the path of destruction until it is too late for the prey to escape. The enemy knows each of our areas of weakness that triggers us to move toward isolation. Not because he can read our mind, but because he has been observing and studying our behavior—just as any hunter would do.

Let us be sober minded so that we will recognize the isolation triggers quickly before we move too far on the path of destruction. The easiest time to escape is at the beginning of the path—at the juncture of right and wrong—of good and evil. The further we proceed along the path of destruction, the harder it will be to escape (repent). By the time we are at the trap or pit, the momentum moves us to just jump in and get it over with. Be sober and know where you are along the way. Know when there are deterrents, obstacles, and temptations. It is not like they have changed that much throughout your life. Know what tends to trigger your need to isolate, and begin to find ways to deal with it in the light, with the help of God and a few healthy people.



When we isolate, we attempt to resolve the problem apart from anyone else. We pull away from family, friends, spouse, church, and God—to do what we want to do to, in an effort to protect ourselves, because we believe we can't trust anyone. Although we may think we are hiding—the enemy knows exactly where we are—and so does God.

What are your top 3 isolation triggers?

In each case, what behaviors are associated with your isolation?

What do you need to begin doing today to overcome isolation?
