

1 Timothy 5:1-10 — What Are God's Cures For Loneliness And Vulnerability?

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Do you feel lonely? Estimates claim one in every five people in the United States struggle with loneliness. Even though we are connected in every imaginable way electronically, research tells us people are lonelier today than in 1984 — before the Internet. Loneliness is particularly prevalent among the elderly. One study in Britain discovered that half a million people over the age of 60 go for an entire week talking to anyone. That same study revealed that a million people over the age of 50 only talk with someone every five or six days.¹ The research is clear. A lot of people struggle with loneliness, but it is rampant among the elderly. This morning, we are going to discover God's cure for loneliness.

Welcome to the CrossWinds Spirit Lake Campus. It is great to have you on Mother's Day. Each of us has a mother. If she is living, I hope you can find time today to honor her and tell her you love her. Our mothers are extremely important people to whom we are forever indebted.

On both of our campuses, we are studying through the book of 1 Timothy. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, the young pastor of the church of Ephesus, to encourage and guide him as he pastored that church. The first third of the letter pertains to doctrine. People of the church in Ephesus and even leaders in the church of Ephesus were leaving Jesus behind and looking for something new. Paul was adamant in this letter that Jesus is like not a fashion

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loneliness>

trend. Jesus does not go in and out of style. He is the only way to God. We never take our focus off him.

In the middle third of 1 Timothy Paul taught Timothy about the importance of pursuing godliness in our lives. In addition he taught Timothy about the hard work of being a pastor. This morning, as we enter the later third of 1 Timothy, Paul was teaching Timothy about the importance of relationships and how we treat one another in the church. This is intensely practical stuff. Most of the problems in our lives are relationship problems, and Paul was teaching us about this important area.

While the church may look like just another group like your fitness class at the YMCA or your softball league, the relationships we have in the church with one another are fundamentally different. The only reason the church exists is because of Jesus. Jesus died for our sin. He adopted us into his family; then he knit us together into the church. This changes the way we relate. Paul said the church is a family. We are adopted brothers and sisters in God's household. Every weekend when we meet, it is a family reunion. The church is a place where we love each other, look out for one another and care for one another because we are part of the family of God. Since we are family, that changes the way we treat one another.

The church is my family. I am not alone.

Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. 1 Timothy 5:1–2 (ESV)

As we saw earlier, young Pastor Timothy — who was in his 30s — had the job of getting the church of Ephesus in order because people were drifting

away from Jesus. That meant he needed to have some tough conversations. Apparently most of those conversations would be with older men. How was he to treat them even though they were drifting away from Jesus? He wasn't to rebuke them harshly but to encourage them like he would his own father.

Let's face it. Church can be frustrating. As a younger man, some of the most frustrating people in the church can be older men. What can make it frustrating is older men are usually in the seats of influence. They are also the most conservative and risk averse. In addition, older men usually like things they way they were in the past. On the other hand young men are filled with energy, creativity and ideas. Older men are usually the first to shut down those ideas and tell you why they won't work. It is usually because they tried it 20 years ago and it didn't work. The old men in the church look at the young men and say, "You just wait until you need to put your teeth in a cup to brush them. Then you will see the wisdom of my cranky ways." How are frustrated young men to have those tough conversations with older men in the church?

You don't treat an older man harshly. You always respect an older man even if you disagree with him. One reason you respect him is because of his age. In our culture, age doesn't equate with respect. Biblically, you always go out of your way to respect someone because of his or her age.

It is like the way it works in the military. In the military, you may not like your commanding officer but you salute your commanding officer not because of the person he is but because of the uniform he wears. You salute the uniform. In

the same way, you salute an older man's age even if you disagree with him. You treat an old man with the kindness and the honor you would give your own father.

On the flip side, it is important for older men to go out of their way to build up younger men and encourage them. This is why at the men's shoot-'em-up and blow-'em-up event on Friday night at the Hagbergs we didn't divide it by age like the men were kids at summer camp. We didn't put the 60-year-old men in one group and the 30-year-old men in another. We mix older and younger men, because that is good. It gives the older men a chance to encourage the younger men and the younger men a chance to honor the older men.

This is also why we intentionally look for young developing leaders and allow a seat around the table in our church leadership structure. If young leaders aren't given opportunities at the leadership table, they will eventually leave the church to look for a place they can express their leadership gifts. If the older men never make room for younger men lead the church, they will leave the church. We need to make our choice. We need to give them opportunities to lead our church or let them find opportunities to lead in another church.

How do you treat younger men? You treat them like brothers. Now I realize some of you were more like Judas than Jesus when it came to how you treated your brother. Even in my house a wrestling match broke out between my boys over Christmas when they were wearing their new Christmas clothes. Zippers were torn, and buttons were popped. Christmas clothes were ruined even before they had a chance to see the washer and dryer.

One time, when my boys were younger, David locked Daniel in a mummy sleeping bag and left him in the front yard. Daniel looked like a 5-foot long blue inchworm having a seizure on the lawn.

When it tells us to treat younger men like brothers, torturing them like is not what Paul had in mind. Treating someone like a younger brother means you look out for them and you care for them like family. This means when your brother is working on a big project around his home, you lend a helping hand. Why do you help? You go out of your way to help because he is your brother. Just as you would help your brother out anytime he needs it, you help other men in the church out the same way. Would you loan your brother your chainsaw? Would you loan your generator? You use what you have to help a family member.

What about older women? How should Timothy treat them? Once again, the church is a family so we treat older woman like our mothers. Today is Mother's Day. Do you love your mother? I hope so. What would you do for your mother? Anything she asks. You open the door for your mother. If she needs you to pick up groceries, you pick them up. Every once in a while, you take your mother to dinner so she feels special.

Paul said in the church we treat older women like our mothers. We give them dignity, respect, value and honor. That is the way we treat our mothers, and that is the way we treat older woman in the church. Older women should not feel alone at CrossWinds. They should feel like they have one great big family that cares for them. In our culture, older woman are ignored and forgotten. You don't see an older woman on the cover of a magazine at the checkout line in the

grocery store because everybody ignores older women. In the church, we are to be different. Older women are valued and loved. They are respected, looked after and admired. I can't imagine being an older woman apart from the church. It would be terrible. An older woman at church has an entire family that loves her and cares for her. Coming to church for an older woman is her weekly dose of heaven because it is like a weekly family reunion.

The last part of this verse is very important. Paul told young Timothy how he was to treat the young women in the church. He was to treat them like sisters, with absolute purity. This is a very important verse. Memorize this verse. I did. Young men in the church, listen to me. This is my favorite verse on dating. I used to always hear the question, "How far is too far before the wedding night?" It is real simple. Paul told Timothy to treat younger women like sisters, in all purity. If you wouldn't do it with your sister, you don't do it with your girlfriend. Would you make out with your sister? I hope not. Would you lay on the couch with your arms wrapped around your sister? I don't think so.

I know some of you think I am a total prude. Don't get mad at me. I am just reading the mail. All I do is open the book and let God do the talking. Treat younger women like sisters, with absolute purity. This is very different from our culture. In our culture, young women are viewed as sex objects. In the church, young women are viewed as sisters. Can you notice your sister is pretty? Yes. While you know your sister is attractive you always treat her with honor and dignity. You don't touch your sister in a sexual way. You protect your sister from

creeps that wants to take advantage of her. Don't you be that creep! In the church we value and protect young women, we don't use them.

The way things are supposed to work is you are supposed to meet a Christian girl, probably at church — that is the best place to find a girl that loves Jesus — and you develop a friendship. It is a brother-sister friendship focused on knowing one another and enjoying being together. If that blossoms into romance and marriage, then you praise God. If the relationship fizzles out, it fizzles out without regrets because you were friends, not lovers. You kept your hands off.

Some of you want me to say that men and women should be treated as equals. I don't believe that. I don't think men should treat women like men. The Bible tells us men should treat women like sisters or mothers and give them dignity, respect and honor. That means they should always feel safe, protected and loved in church.

If you are a young woman and there is a guy that is infatuated with you but you have no interest and he is starting to act like a stalker, there is something you can do. You simply tell a brother in the church. You have about 200 brothers and fathers. A few of them will gladly sit the young man down and explain that “We are family. We stick up for one another and your sister in Christ isn't interested in you. Apparently you were hard of hearing and didn't get the message so we just wanted to make it clear that your stalking needs to come to an end.” Trust me. The boy will get the message in a hurry when he realizes you have lots of brothers looking out for you and you are not alone.

Then Paul moved from helping us realize we have a church family so we are not lonely and vulnerable in this world. He then told us we also have a biological family that is standing behind us and with us in time of need.

It is a family responsibility to care for aging parents.

Honor widows who are truly widows. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. 1 Timothy 5:3–4 (ESV)

In the ancient world, the church was in the practice of caring for widows. The first ministry we see in the church was food to widows. We read about it in Acts 6. Apparently there were a lot of widows in the early church. Unlike today, if you were a woman without a husband, there were few jobs available to make ends meet. Your goose was cooked.

What happened in Ephesus was a large number of widows joined the church's free lunch program for widows. In these verses, Paul was going to cut down the size of the free lunch list.

The first thing to understand in this section is what Paul meant by a widow. When we use that word we typically think of an older lady that lost her husband. The Greek word for widow literally means someone that has suffered loss and is left alone. A widow is a woman left alone in this world either through her husband's death, his desertion or by his divorce. A single mother is considered a widow because she is left alone in this world to fend for herself. This morning we are going to look at elderly widows. In two weeks, when we get back to this study after graduation Sunday, we will look at younger widows, also known as single moms. Today, we will look at elderly widows.

The first thing I found interesting as I studied widows was the original purpose of a marriage dowry. In the ancient world a man worked for a few years to save up enough money to buy his wife. Most of us men think that is cruel and unusual punishment. It wasn't intended that way. The dowry was to be given to the senior male member of a young woman's family, which was usually her father. The father was to take the dowry money and put it on deposit at the bank so that it grew in value. This way if his daughter's husband died or he divorced her, there was money in place to care for her and her children so she wouldn't starve to death or be forced into prostitution.

Forcing a young man to pay a dowry was like forcing him to buy a life insurance a policy for his wife so that if anything happened to him or their marriage, she would have financial support.

As I mentioned, the early church cared for widows. The widows that were cared for were those that didn't have a father with a marriage dowry. That meant the church had to care for them since there were no government programs. The typical way it was practiced is food was gathered on Friday mornings and it was distributed on Friday afternoon. The problem is that Ephesus had a lot of women in need so Paul told Timothy how to trim the list.

The first way to trim the list was to look for widows who have children or grandchildren. If you have children or grandchildren, they should care for you, not the church.

If there is a need in your family, you take care of it in the family. This is the way you live your faith and show godliness. If you are a godly man, you figure

into your budget the care of your aging mother or aging father if they are in need. You don't hope the state pays for your mother. She is your mother. You take care of her. Paul said we take care of our aging parents because this is the way Christians show some return to their parents for their hard work raising them up.

I grew up as an only child. My father has juvenile diabetes. He came down with it at age 19. He is turning 84 this month. For 65 years he has given himself two, three, or more shots of insulin every day. He monitors his blood sugar multiple times a day so he doesn't die. That is a long time to manage diabetes. God has saved his life from extremely low blood sugars probably more than a thousand times. It is a difficult life.

My father was an accountant at Kraft Foods. He worked very hard. Every day without fail at 5:10 a.m. his alarm went off to go to work. Even though he has a handicap, he worked hard to provide for his family. Many nights he didn't get home until later in the evening because he worked long hours. He told me that when I was a child he was very careful to manage his blood sugars because he didn't want my mother to be a widow and me to be fatherless. He took out multiple life insurance policies so if he passed away — which was likely — my mother and I would not be forced into poverty. The focus of his life was to survive and provide for his family.

My mother worked as a playground supervisor and a bus driver for handicapped children. She took the job because she wanted to be around the home to be a mother when I came home from school. Both my parents worked extremely hard and sacrificed for me. It only seemed right that three years ago

when my mother came down with cancer that we did everything we could to care for them and pay back some of their sacrifice. Cindy and I took turns living in their Philadelphia home that summer. Cindy sacrificed more than I did as she spent most of the summer apart from us as she cared for my mother as she died of cancer and cared for father as he struggled with diabetes. After mom's funeral, my father didn't want to be a burden. He insisted on living on his own, which was certain disaster. After a number of close calls where his diabetes almost took his life, he finally agreed to come and live with us because we want to care for him.

Why do we have him living with us? It is biblical. It is living our faith and paying dad back for all the sacrifice he made in me and for my family over the years. It is making sure he is not lonely. We are the only living family he has left. We want him with us. While dad had a great church in Pennsylvania I told them that caring for my father was not their responsibility. It is my responsibility.

Paul said sacrificing your life for your parents is pleasing in the sight of God. It is obeying the Ten Commandments.

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. Exodus 20:12 (ESV)

God says longevity in the Promised Land was tied to how his people honored their parents. This was not just address to young children with 30-year-old parents. This is primarily talking about middle-aged children honoring their elderly parents. God is pleased when we make sacrifices to care for our parents.

A true widow has no family.

She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. 1 Timothy 5:5–6 (ESV)

A true widow is someone left alone in the world. She doesn't have family to fall back upon. Since she doesn't have biological family to care for her, her only hope is her church family. In addition, a true widow is without financial resources. A true widow literally prays to God for her daily bread because she is flat broke.

It sounds bad to be a widow with no family and no hope for food because you are so flat broke, but there is a worse situation. That is a widow that isn't flat broke but she has plenty of money because her husband left it to her. Instead of helping people with her free time and adequate resources, she has turned into a self-indulgent woman. This is what I call the, "It is all about me" widow. Paul said her husband may already be dead but as far as Paul was concerned this woman was already dead even though she is living because all she cares about with her money is herself. She is the walking dead. She is a zombie. It is right here in the Bible that zombies exist. They are self-indulgent women. This is a well-off elderly person that entertains herself not by helping others but by pandering to herself and spending money wastefully.

I will give you an example of what one of these self-indulgent elderly women looks like. This is the 75-year-old woman that gets plastic surgery so she can look like she is 50. This is a 75-year-old woman that thinks she is young and hip so she gets a tattoo. Don't laugh. I know these women. Imagine what it looks like to be 75 going into a tattoo parlor. Getting a tattoo at 75 is not cool. Do any of you remember Silly Putty? Remember how you could put it on the comic strips in the Sunday paper and when you pulled it up there was a copy of the comic strip?

Then you pulled the Silly Putty to make it distort. That is what a tattoo looks like on a 75-year-old woman. She has no collagen left in her skin. A tattoo looks like an ink blob. It is not sexy. If you are a well-to-do elderly person, don't be self-indulgent. Use your freedom and finances to care for others, not just yourself.

Paul said you don't evaluate an elderly woman's life based on her wealth. We evaluate her life based on her godliness. A poor woman that gets her clothes at Goodwill and loves Jesus but she needs to pray for her next meal is 10 times the woman of a rich cougar that tries to act like a 60- or 70-year-old version of Paris Hilton.

The best example of this comes from Jesus. Look what Jesus says about this:

And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." Mark 12:41–44 (ESV)

Jesus said, "That is a godly woman. Don't evaluate an elderly woman based upon the size of her wallet. Evaluate her based upon her godliness."

My work so I can serve my family and not myself.

Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Timothy 5:7–8 (ESV)

Here is a great verse. Today everybody thinks their jobs are to give them more money to spend on themselves. Our jobs are not to make ourselves rich. They are not even to make ourselves feel fulfilled. After honoring Jesus, our jobs

are there to help us serve others in need, especially our families. This means dad's go to work not so they can buy a bigger boat or a bigger car. Dads go to work to provide for the needs of their wives, children and also their relatives. Mom, some of you also work to provide for the family. After a while you wonder where to find time for yourself because there isn't much time. There is nothing wrong with time to yourself, but the truth is our work is not to find time for ourselves but grow in our ability to serve others.

Finally, Paul gives a stiff rebuke. If you don't care for your own relatives, you are worse than a pagan and your life is repudiating your Christian faith. This is a big theme in this section. When someone in our family is hurting — that could be your son, your daughter, your mother, your grandmother, your father or your grandfather — it is your responsibility to help him or her because her or she is your family.

We started out with a question. What are God's cures for loneliness and vulnerability? The answer is one word — family. It is first of all your biological family that provides friendship and support in your time of need. When the chips are down and you feel all alone, your family is there for you. When your family can't be there and when you are all alone, there is another family. It is your church family that is filled with your brothers, sisters, mothers and father that love and care for you.

Our biological families and church family are God's answer to loneliness and vulnerability in our lives.



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