

The Crisis of Isolation

Depression, family, society
and the path of care

By: Pastor Paul Rech

*No one
has to walk
alone.*



FAMILY
COMMUNITY
HOPE
LIFE

*"Come to me, all you
who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest."*

Matthew 11:28

LISTEN
WELCOME
INCLUDE
SUPPORT
HELP
RESTORE
—
TOGETHER
THERE IS
MORE LIFE

GOD'S WORD
ALSO
CARES
—

You
Matter
♥

MENTAL HEALTH | RELATIONSHIPS | FAITH | A MORE COMPASSIONATE SOCIETY

THE CRISIS OF ISOLATION

When depression distances us from people and how family, society, and the church can help

Our time is paradoxical. Never have we had so many means of communication and, at the same time, so many people feel profoundly alone. Phones, social networks, and apps can connect us in seconds with someone on the other side of the world, but they do not necessarily meet the human need for closeness, welcome, belonging, and genuine relationships.

Within this scenario lies a troubling reality: **isolation associated with depression.**

A person facing depression may gradually begin to withdraw from family, friends, church, work, and activities that once brought pleasure. Sometimes the person shuts himself or herself away in a room. At other times, the person continues working and smiling but emotionally begins to disconnect from everyone.

It is important to understand that isolation does not always mean that the person has stopped loving the family or has simply decided not to participate in social life anymore. Often, isolation is the consequence of intense emotional suffering.

The question we need to ask is not only: **“Why is this person withdrawing?”**

But also: **“What may be happening inside this person that makes withdrawing seem easier than remaining close to others?”**

WHEN DEPRESSION LEADS TO ISOLATION

Depression should not be confused with a simple moment of sadness.

Sadness is a natural human emotion. We all experience losses, frustrations, disappointments, and difficult periods. Depression, however, may involve persistent changes in mood, energy, motivation, thoughts, sleep, appetite, concentration, self-esteem, and the ability to experience pleasure.

Among the behaviors frequently observed is **social isolation.**

The person begins to decline invitations.

Stops calling.

Does not respond to messages.

Loses interest in family gatherings.

Withdraws from church.

Avoids talking about what he or she feels.

Spends long periods alone.

In some situations, the person even begins to see his or her own presence as a burden to others.

This last aspect deserves special attention.

When someone begins to think:

“My family would be better off without me.”

“I only cause problems.”

“No one would miss me.”

“I don't want to bother anyone.”

we are dealing with thoughts that should not be treated with indifference.

The family needs to draw near.

Prolonged isolation can create a dangerous emotional cycle:

**suffering → withdrawal → loneliness → negative thoughts
→ more suffering → more withdrawal.**

The more a person isolates, the less he or she receives positive stimulation, conversation, affection, social contact, and opportunities to realize that he or she continues to be important to other people.

THE BIBLE ALSO SHOWS PEOPLE IN DEEP SUFFERING

One of the riches of Scripture is that the Bible does not portray its characters as emotionally invulnerable people.

Men and women of God experienced fear, sadness, loneliness, anguish, exhaustion, and despair.

Elijah: exhausted, isolated, and wanting to give up

After an extraordinary spiritual victory on Mount Carmel, Elijah entered a profound crisis.

After receiving a threat from Jezebel, he fled into the wilderness.

The Bible records: ***“But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die.” 1 Kings 19:4***

It is striking to observe that a man who only moments earlier had demonstrated tremendous courage was now alone under a tree saying, in other words, “I can't take this anymore.”

God's response is extremely significant.

Before presenting a long theological explanation, God cared for Elijah's immediate needs.

He needed to **sleep**.

He needed to **eat**.

He needed to **rest**.

He needed to become aware again of God's presence.

After that, Elijah received guidance and was reminded that he was not alone.

This passage teaches us something important about mental health: we are whole beings. Body, mind, emotions, relationships, and spirituality are interconnected.

Not every emotional problem disappears simply by telling the person:

“You need to have more faith.” Elijah had faith.

But what he also had was **exhaustion**.

DAVID AND THE LANGUAGE OF EMOTIONAL PAIN

The Psalms show several moments in which David expresses feelings of deep anguish.

In Psalm 42 we find: “*Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?*” Psalm 42:5

David does not ignore his emotional state.

He speaks to his own soul.

He recognizes that there is an inner disturbance.

This is an important lesson.

Acknowledging pain does not mean an absence of faith.

There are people who suffer in silence because they believe that admitting vulnerability would be a demonstration of spiritual weakness.

That needs to change.

A healthy community should allow someone to say:

“Today I am not doing well.”

“I am tired.”

“I am anxious.”

“I am sad.”

“I need to talk.”

“I need help.”

The church should be a place where these words can be spoken without shame.

JOB: WHEN PAIN BECOMES DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN

Job lost possessions, children, health, and emotional stability.

His friends came to visit him.

At first they did something extraordinarily wise:

“So, they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great.” Job 2:13

Before trying to explain the suffering, they simply remained present.

This may be one of the greatest lessons for anyone who wants to help someone who is emotionally fragile:

we do not always need to have an answer; often we need to offer our presence.

Unfortunately, Job's friends later began to talk too much. They tried to find causes, people to blame, and explanations.

And they ended up increasing his pain.

We do the same thing today.

When someone is depressed, we may say:

“You need to pull yourself together.”

“There are people in much worse situations.”

“You have everything you need to be happy.”

“It's all in your head.”

“You need to get out of this.”

Although some of these phrases are spoken with good intentions, they can increase the sense of guilt in someone who is already suffering.

The person thinks: **“Besides already feeling bad, now I am also disappointing everyone because I cannot get better.”**

WHAT CAN THE FAMILY DO?

The family has a fundamental role.

This does not mean that family members will be able to resolve depression on their own. It means that they can become an important **emotional safety net**.

1. DRAW NEAR WITHOUT INTRUDING

Instead of saying: **“You need to talk to me.”**

It may be better to say: **“I've noticed that you've been quieter lately. I want you to know that I'm here.”**

That small difference changes everything.

One statement demands.

The other offers.

Someone who is suffering needs to feel that there is an open door for conversation.

2. LEARN TO LISTEN

James wrote: ***“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak.” James 1:19***

This principle has enormous value in relationships.

Listening is not simply remaining silent while waiting for our turn to speak.

Listening means trying to understand.

We can ask: **“What has been the hardest thing for you?”**

“Is there anything I can do to help you?”

“Do you want to talk, or would you rather I simply stay here with you?”

Sometimes silent presence is worth more than dozens of pieces of advice.

3. DO NOT TURN EVERY FORM OF SUFFERING INTO A SPIRITUAL PROBLEM

Faith is an extraordinary source of hope, meaning, comfort, and strength.

But we need to avoid oversimplification.

A person may deeply love God and still experience depression.

A person may pray and still need psychological care.

A person may read the Bible and still need to talk with a mental health professional.

A person may be a pastor, missionary, chaplain, or Christian leader and still experience emotional exhaustion.

Jesus said: ***“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”*** *Luke 5:31*

Seeking professional help does not need to be interpreted as opposition to faith or as spiritual weakness.

Responsible treatment may include medical evaluation, psychotherapy, changes in habits, strengthening the support network, spiritual care, and, when indicated by qualified professionals, medication treatment.

WHAT CAN SOCIETY DO?

We need to replace a culture of judgment with a culture of awareness and care.

An isolated person should not simply disappear from our memory.

If someone who regularly participated in a community stops showing up, someone should ask: **“Where are they?”**

If a neighbor begins to withdraw from everyday interaction, perhaps a brief visit could make a difference.

If a coworker drastically changes behavior, it may be important to ask whether everything is all right.

The apostle Paul wrote: ***“Bear one another's burdens.”*** *Galatians 6:2*

Bearing someone's burden does not mean living that person's life.

It means not allowing the person to walk alone when the burden has become too heavy.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

The church has unique conditions for combating isolation because its very nature is communal.

The Greek word **koinonia**, often translated as fellowship, describes participation, relationship, and sharing.

Hebrews 10:24-25 teaches: ***“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.”***

But this passage can also be viewed from another angle.

When someone stops attending church, our reaction should **not** simply be:

“He is drifting away from the church.”

Perhaps we should ask: **“Why did he stop coming?”**

Perhaps a silent battle is taking place.

An attentive church notices absences.

A loving church looks for people.

A mature church does not only count how many people entered the service; it notices who stopped coming.

JESUS AND ISOLATED PEOPLE

The ministry of Jesus presents a remarkable pattern.

Jesus drew near to those from whom society often withdrew.

He spoke with the Samaritan woman.

He touched lepers.

He entered the homes of rejected people.

He stopped at the cry of Bartimaeus.

He noticed Zacchaeus in a tree.

He encountered people who were on the margins.

The Samaritan woman in John 4, for example, came to the well at an unusual time. Although the text does not explicitly state that she was avoiding other women, her social context reveals a life marked by complicated relationships and possible rejection.

Jesus did not begin that conversation with an accusation.

He began by saying: **“Give Me a drink.”** *John 4:7*

Jesus created a bridge of communication.

Perhaps this is a principle that our society needs to relearn:

Before trying to correct someone, we need to be able to reach that person.

SMALL ACTIONS CAN HAVE GREAT IMPORTANCE

We do not need to wait for a severe crisis before demonstrating care.

A simple message: **“I'm thinking about you.”**

A phone call: **“How are you?”**

An invitation: **“Would you like to have coffee?”**

A visit.

A walk.

A meal together.

A prayer.

A time of listening.

These actions do not replace professional treatment when it is needed, but they can reduce the feeling of abandonment.

And there is a profound difference between being alone and feeling abandoned.

WHEN WE NEED TO TAKE THE SITUATION MORE SERIOUSLY

There are situations in which family and friends need to respond with special attention.

If someone begins to speak frequently about death, hopelessness, worthlessness, feeling like a burden to others, wanting to disappear, or not wanting to continue living, those statements need to be taken seriously.

Intense changes in behavior, unusual farewells, sudden abandonment of responsibilities, extreme isolation, or statements that “there is no way out anymore” also deserve attention.

In these circumstances, we should not leave the person completely alone or treat those words as a simple attempt to get attention.

It is necessary to seek support from qualified professionals and, when there is immediate risk, to contact the emergency services available in the community.

Carefully asking about emotional suffering or thoughts of death is not a lack of faith. It is care. It is love.

It is responsibility.

WE WERE NOT CREATED TO LIVE ALONE

At the very beginning of Scripture, we find a fundamental statement:

“It is not good that man should be alone.” *Genesis 2:18*

Although this text appears in the context of the creation of the family, it reveals a broader truth about human nature:

we were created for relationships.

We need people.

We need to talk.

We need to touch and be touched.

We need to love and be loved.

We need to care for others and allow others to care for us.

Isolation may initially seem like a place of protection for someone who is emotionally wounded.

But what begins as protection can become a prison.

For this reason, family, church, and society need to learn to notice the doors that are slowly closing.

Not to break them down. But to remain outside saying:

“When you are ready to open the door, I will still be here.”

CONCLUSION

The crisis of isolation associated with depression will not be resolved by speeches alone.

It requires relationships. It requires attention.

It requires listening. It requires ongoing support.

It requires mental health knowledge. It requires families that are present.

It requires trained professionals. It requires welcoming communities.

And, for those who believe, it also requires a spirituality that knows how to draw near to the wounded in the same way Christ drew near to people.

Paul wrote: ***“Comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.”*** 1 Thessalonians 5:14

Notice the three verbs:

Comfort.

Support.

Be patient.

Perhaps this is one of the best directions for our generation.

We will not always be able to immediately lift someone out of sadness.

We will not always have an explanation for the person's pain.

We will not always know exactly what to say.

But we can be present.

We can listen.

We can walk alongside them.

We can encourage them to seek help.

We can pray.

We can remind that person that his or her life continues to possess dignity and value.

And we can refuse to allow someone to face alone one of the most difficult nights of his or her life.

Because sometimes the first light a person is able to see in the midst of darkness does not come from a great explanation; it may come simply from the presence of someone who decided to remain by that person's side.

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