

The Loneliness of Suffering and Service

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ... and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

—Matthew 26:36-38

There is the loneliness of suffering—in sickness, when you are ill and alone, with no one to take care of you. When you are in a deep valley or trial, no one to talk to, what must it be like? Perhaps you have a particular type of suffering or illness, weakness or trial that no one has had but you. You look high and low for some other person who will know exactly what you are going through. You feel so lonely.

That is where Jesus comes in. There is not a single temptation that you can have that He doesn't understand. He sympathizes; He never lectures. You may go to another person, and he may say, "Oh, are you bothered about that?" And you just feel awful that you even went to him in the first place. You then look for one other person, and sometimes you won't find that other person or he just doesn't understand how you feel. But Jesus does. Is this your thorn in the flesh?

There is loneliness when you have to make decisions or a judgment that isn't going to be appreciated. And so you can be in ministry, doing the Lord's work, but nobody appreciates what you are doing. No one is going to do it but you, and they take you for granted.

Perhaps you have taken a courageous stand, but no one understands. Listen to Paul: "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held

against them" (2 Tim. 4:16). There are those missionaries who have left family and friends. They have gone to an alien country, away from familiar surroundings. The loneliness of service. There is the loneliness of doing things in your own church. Nobody knows you do it, but God knows.

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