

**DR. ED YOUNG**

# **LONELINESS**



**Dr. Ed Young**



**LONELINESS:  
Silencing the Echoes**



*Turn to me and be gracious to me,  
For I am lonely and afflicted.  
The troubles of my heart are enlarged;  
Bring me out of my distresses.*

Psalm 25:16-17

Published by The Winning Walk (The Broadcast Ministry of Second Baptist Church, Houston, Texas)

*Loneliness*

Copyright © 2013 by Dr. Ed Young

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations in critical articles or reviews.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org))

Other Scripture references are from the following sources:

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com) The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

The Holy Bible, New Living Translation® (NLT®) Copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture is taken from *GOD’S WORD*®. Copyright © 1995 God’s Word to the Nations. Used by permission of Baker Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

The King James Version (KJV). Public domain.

For information contact:

The Winning Walk  
P.O. Box 1414  
Houston, TX 77251  
[www.winningwalk.org](http://www.winningwalk.org)  
[www.second.org](http://www.second.org)

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-934590-88-1

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	7
Chapter One: Loneliness is Not a Sin .....	11
Chapter Two: Consecrated Loneliness .....	17
Chapter Three: The ECHOs of Loneliness .....	29
E: Emotional Loneliness .....	31
C: Chronic Loneliness .....	37
H: Habitual Loneliness .....	45
O: Obliging Loneliness .....	51
Conclusion .....	63

## INTRODUCTION

*“Who knows what true loneliness is – not the conventional word, but the naked terror?”*

Joseph Conrad<sup>1</sup>

“Are you lonesome tonight?” This question breaks into the human condition of loneliness with a direct hit – so much so, that a song entitled “Are you Lonesome Tonight?” ranks in the top 100 on *Billboard’s Greatest Songs of All Time*.

Why?

I believe it is because the question resonates with so many people. Mother Teresa, who spent her life ministering to some of the world’s most poverty ravished people claimed, “The most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved.” I believe she is right.

Recently, I read a disturbing story about a woman named Yvette Vickers. Frankly, I had never heard of her. Apparently, she was a former *Playboy Playmate* and B-horror movie actress. At the time of the article, she would have been 83, but no one knows exactly how old she was when she actually died, because she had been dead for over a year when she was found. A neighbor began to notice cobwebs across Yvette’s mailbox and yellowed

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* (New York; London: Harper Brothers, 1910).

mail within the box. When knocking did not produce a response, she broke a window and reached in to unlock the door. Ironically, what she found could have been the scene from one of the actresses' horror films. According to the coroner, the elderly woman was "mummified." Alone in her upstairs bedroom, the blue light of a computer emitted an eerie glow. A space heater was still whirring next to the actress' body. How the power had stayed on for the better part of a year was not addressed, but what proved true was the fact that this woman had been dead for at least a year...and no one missed her.

I submit to you that the eerie scene is not the true horror...instead, the utter loneliness and isolation is what will haunt most people who hear her story. Further investigation uncovered that her last communications had not been with family members or friends. Instead, she had gone onto websites that mentioned her various films and contacted "fans." At the end of her life, she was reaching out to strangers who were far from her Benedict Canyon home, and far from knowing the real Yvette – a little old lady living isolated and alone above Sunset Boulevard.

The irony does not stop here. It seems that within two weeks of her lonely death being made public, over 16,000 Facebook posts and 881 Tweets acknowledged Yvette Vickers in some way. She had once again become an icon of horror – loneliness.

This story is a nightmare in every sense of the word. For anyone who picked up

this booklet hoping to find comfort or hope because you struggle with loneliness, the death of Yvette Vickers strikes at our worst fears. We read her story and rightly think, “This is a tragedy. No one should die this way.”

Her story is tragic, because God did not create us for such a lonely, isolated existence. The Lord created us for community. He said to Adam, “It is not good for man to be alone.” As human beings, we were wired for relationships because we were made in the image of God who is relational. (Genesis 1:26-27) Our craving for community is God given, and I believe our isolation and separation from fellowship is a work of the evil one who came to steal, to kill, and to destroy. (John 10:10)

In the pages of this booklet, I hope to offer you truth that will counteract the lies that keep many imprisoned in loneliness. I hope to shed light on the different faces of loneliness and to offer tangible solutions. Jesus Christ said in John 8:28, “*You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.*” My great prayer for you is that the God of all comfort will be with you; that He will encourage and equip you to overcome your fears and to engage with the community that your soul so deeply desires.

## CHAPTER 1

### Loneliness Is Not a Sin

*“When Christ said: I was hungry and you fed me, he didn’t mean only the hunger for bread and for food; he also meant the hunger to be loved. Jesus himself experienced this loneliness.*

*He came amongst his own and his own received him not, and it hurt him then and it has kept on hurting him. The same hunger, the same loneliness, the same having no one to be accepted by and to be loved and wanted by. Every human being in that case resembles Christ in his loneliness; and that is the hardest part, that’s real hunger.”*

Mother Teresa<sup>2</sup>

*“When you know Jesus, you will never be lonely.”* I have heard the platitude many times, and I have said it as many times as I have heard it. Fundamentally, the statement is true. God is immanent – with us. Matthew 1:22-23 describes the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, which predicts Jesus’ birth, and the ultimate expression of God’s presence among us. However, there is a distinct difference in being *alone* and being *lonely*.

Often, I think well-meaning people try to comfort a lonely soul by speaking those words, “When you know Jesus, you will never

---

<sup>2</sup>Dorothy Hunt, ed., *Love: A Fruit Always in Season: Daily Meditations by Mother Teresa* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987).



be lonely.” But as an exasperated friend once exclaimed, “Yes, but Jesus isn’t going to call me to go to the movies!” True. And the Bible tells us that Jesus Himself was lonely.

Remember, Jesus was *fully* human when He walked this earth. Therefore, He experienced the vast array of human emotions each of us face. Matthew 26:36-46 demonstrates how very lonely Jesus was in His most critical hour of need. Jesus, both fully divine and fully human, knew that His hour of death was near. He went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. He took his three closest friends. As a man, He *needed* their companionship, their support, and their prayers. But each man let Him down. They slept as He anguished. In verse 38 of Matthew 26, “*He said to them, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me.’*” And yet, they slept.

Three times, Jesus expressed to his friends that He needed them to stay awake and to pray. Each time, they abandoned that request. Jesus knew God. He prayed to God. He was God. And yet, I believe Jesus knows exactly what it feels like to be heart-wrenchingly lonely.

My point is to help reassure you of two things. One, Jesus does know how you feel. Talk to Him about your loneliness, and be assured that He has experienced stark alienation, as well.

Second, I want to encourage you that expressing loneliness is not a sin. I opened this chapter with a well-worn phrase that seems to cause some people to question their

faith. One may ponder, “If I really had faith in Jesus, would I be lonely?” The answer is yes, you could be. Jesus Himself suffered from loneliness, as we read in Matthew.

As a man, Jesus longed for fellowship with His fellow man. As God, He longed for fellowship with God. We are made in God’s image; therefore, we need connection – fellowship with both man and God.

Loneliness comes when either connection is out of whack. C.S. Lewis talks about two kinds of love. *Need* love and *gift* love. *Need* love is obvious. Everybody has a need to be loved and to know that they are important, and loved by someone. *Gift* love is the storehouse, the gift closet of our love. People have the need to give their love to others. Often, loneliness is not the absence of love from another person, but the absence of another person on whom we can lavish our love!

I believe there is another kind of love: *appreciation* love. We need to have the kind of love that *appreciates God*. How do we demonstrate that kind of love? Worship. When we begin to worship Him, we take the focus off ourselves and our needs. This love, this act of worship does something supernatural. When I am pouring out love to God in the form of worship, I am able to receive love. Because of the two-way dynamic of worship, love flows out of me and into me.

“That’s great, Pastor,” you may be thinking. “But I have been very lonely, even surrounded by a crowd at church.” And the truth of the matter is that we can be at our loneliest in a crowd. But here is what I want

you to see.

Loneliness, like hunger, is born of need. You know that when you feel hungry, you need food. And when you feel lonely, you are in need of companionship. Human touch. If you retreat, you will not be able to feed that need of human companionship. So, you must take action. Remember *gift* love? Open your storehouse – your gift closet – and haul it out. Start with the Golden Rule: Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you. You want someone to like you? Want to be around you? Love you? Offer those same blessings to them. In a nutshell, what you need, is *what you need to give*.

Do you need someone to listen to you? You listen to someone.

Do you need someone to help you? Go help someone.

Do you need a friend? Be a friend.

Over the years, I have found that often loneliness sets in at defining moments in our lives. You see, some people allow life to stop when an event occurs. It can be a tragedy or a triumph...but life stops, and loneliness creeps in and stays.

I met an elderly man who wore a big lapel button that said, "I attended the Chicago World's Fair." The fair was in 1933. You could talk to him for two minutes and he would begin to reminisce about the 1933 World's Fair. My heart ached for him and the lonely existence he had eked out for himself. Dwelling on a single event in his life, he identified with no one else. He bored others with his repetitive tales of that year from his past. What had his life been like

in 1937, 1945, 1958, 1967, 1977, 1980, etc....? How many people could he have poured into? Instead, he chose a defining moment and he stopped really existing after that.

I have met people who continue to be the victim of a loss. A tragic death of a loved one or a bitter divorce cordons off their hearts, and they become lonely, lonely people.

What is the solution? Is there a tonic for the ailment of loneliness?

Yes, there is!

Reach out and touch someone. Seek community. Our church is bursting at the seams with opportunity for fellowship. We have volunteer programs, children's groups, shut-in ministries, music groups, athletic events, homeless ministries, tutoring opportunities, sewing departments, child care needs – you name it, we have a place where you will fit.

Many, many churches in every corner of our country have opportunities and real needs for people just like you to bring your talents, your gifts, your two hands and one heart into the fellowship of the church community.

Let me take this time to remind you that you were created with special gifts and talents. Often, people find themselves engulfed in loneliness when they fail to exercise those gifts. Talents traverse the spectrum from having a lovely singing voice to possessing superb organizational skills. However, those gifts are easily recognizable. Many, many talents are hidden and less obvious, but your Heavenly Father knows about them and wants

you to use them in His service and service to others.

One woman I know thought she had no talents, no gifts, nothing to offer. But guess what she did really well? Wrapped packages! I am the head pastor of our church and people may look at me and say I have an obvious gift: teaching. But guess what? We give out over 8000 wrapped packages to needy children every year during the Christmas season. And there is not one child who would want to see a package wrapped by me. I would not know where to begin!

That, my friend, is what the Body of Christ is all about...many different people with various skills and specialties touching others for His glory.

People from all walks of life file through the doors of our church looking to reach someone else. As you reach out, you will be embraced...by human touch and by serving Him. *“Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full – pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.”* (Luke 6:38 NLT)

## CHAPTER 2

### Consecrated Loneliness

*“To most people, loneliness is a doom. Yet, loneliness is the very thing which God has chosen to be one of the schools of training for His very own. It is the fire that sheds the dross and reveals the gold.”<sup>3</sup>*

Bernard M. Martin

There is a certain season of loneliness that ushers in a time of great duty. I'll call it *consecrated loneliness*. The word *consecrated* means “to declare or set apart as sacred.”<sup>4</sup> Sometimes the answer to loneliness is to do something about it. But other times, the answer to loneliness is to see what God has purposed in it for you. Consider the prophet Elijah. 1 Kings 17, 18, and 19 provide a story of such awe and inspiration that I encourage you to read it and meditate upon it yourself. I'll summarize the story. The people of God were in rebellion. Many had begun to dishonor God and to incorporate the worship of Baal into their customs. Through the prophet Elijah, God sent word that there would be a drought for three years. And so, the dry and arid season began. Meanwhile the Lord instructed Elijah to go to a lonely place where He would send the ravens to minister to him so he would

---

<sup>3</sup><http://www.quotationsbook.com>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.thefreedictionary.com>

not suffer the ravages of the drought. Later, God spoke to Elijah and instructed him to leave that place and to go to a certain widow's house where God would further provide for him during the drought that was destroying the land.

Elijah found the widow, but she had no food or water and was preparing her last meal for her young son. She was preparing for them to die. Elijah assured her that the Lord God would provide food, water, and oil for them. If she would share what little she had with him, her water, oil, and flour would never run out. She did so, and God miraculously provided an unending flow of food and water.

Finally, Elijah got word that the drought would end. God instructed him to go to the king and inform him that the Lord would end the drought. Now the king of Israel at the time was Ahab. He was a weak man who had married Jezebel, a non-Hebrew, who worshiped pagan gods. She had ordered the death of all the prophets of God and had been vocal about her hatred of Elijah. Elijah told the king to bring all the prophets of the Baals and of the pagan god, Asherah, to Mount Carmel. Elijah also sent word to all the people of Israel to come up to the mountain.

Soon, there was a huge crowd on Mount Carmel. Elijah cried out to his fellow Israelites, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? Serve God, or serve Baal." Notice what Elijah says next, "*Then Elijah said to the people, 'I alone am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men.'*" (1 Kings 18:23) He was lonely in his situation.

He stood among the elite and the worldly, and he had a big job to do. It appeared no one on earth, or at least on that mountain was on his side. Sure, they wanted rain, but they did not want to have to walk with God.

So Elijah's duty was to set the stage for God to show His power. All the prophets of Baal had gathered. The uncommitted people gathered there also. Any show of strength, and they would sway toward that leader. Elijah instructed the prophets of Baal to build an altar to offer a burnt sacrifice and he would do the same. However, no one was permitted to light the fire; instead, Elijah declared that whichever altar was consumed by fire would indicate whether the fire was sent by God, or the gods of Baal.

Now, to make things really tricky, Baal was actually known as the god of fire. It seemed as though Elijah was setting himself up for failure. He allowed the other prophets to go first, and so they did. They began to chant, dance, and call on the name of Baal. Nothing happened. Their ritual became more frenzied, and they began to wail, chant, and cut themselves. Yet, not even a spark of fire flickered. Exhausted, they stopped. Then Elijah stepped forward. It was God's turn. After building the altar, Elijah carefully poured water all over the wood, the sacrifice, and the altar. He drenched it. Then he looked to heaven and asked God to let fire fall.

Phoom! In an instant fire fell from the sky and consumed the altar, the sacrifice, and all the water around it.

The people fell down and worshiped



God. A small cloud appeared in the sky. It grew. And just as God had promised through Elijah, it rained.

Immediately, Queen Jezebel sent out a decree that Elijah should be killed. Elijah, through whom God had saved the people from the deadly drought, ran for his life. He entered a wilderness and hid under a juniper tree. There, isolated and alone, he slept. When he awoke, God spoke to him and told him to sleep some more. God was watching over him, restoring him physically and psychologically.

There are three things I want you to see here. One, Elijah entered a wilderness, a lonely and challenging place. Two, God was allowing Elijah to be restored through rest. Three, Elijah was also completely alone. Are you under a juniper tree right now? Do you feel that God and everyone else has abandoned you, and you are lonely and worn out? If this is the place in which you find yourself, rest. Stop striving and trying to figure out what is happening. Stop trying to place blame on the “Jezebels and Israelites” (those who are coming after you and those who have abandoned you) in your life. Now, consider the rest of the story.

God ministered to Elijah through rest. After Elijah took an intellectual, physical and spiritual break, he got up and began to seek God’s direction again. First, he poured out his heart to God and told Him how upset he was. He recounted to God his obedience. Elijah went on to remind God of the faith he had when he stood alone against all of the Israelites and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Sadly, even after the powerful

demonstration, Elijah stood alone without so much as a “thanks for the rain” from anyone. At this point, Elijah entered a cave.

Notice the symbolism here. Do you have a hideout that is your cave? I know men who have “man caves,” women who have prayer closets, teenagers who hide out in their rooms, and people who go for long walks, but the common denominator is that they pull away from society. In that place, we can hear from God.

The Scripture tells us that a wind blew, and Elijah thought God would speak to him in the wind. Next, an earthquake rocked the cave. But God did not speak through the earthquake. Then the wilderness around the cave caught on fire. But God was not in the fire. Finally, “the still small voice” of the Lord spoke to Elijah and gave him directions.

So, when you experience this kind of consecrated loneliness – a time of rest and preparation that sets you apart unto God alone – first, allow Him to take care of you.

Second, seek to hear from Him. For what purpose has He allowed this juniper tree in the wilderness, this loneliness to occur? As you seek Him, you’ll discover He is already seeking you.

Often, we spend so much time in the fight, we cannot hear God’s voice. Constant activities, TV, emails, cell phones, and general racket can keep us in the fray and distract us from God’s voice. Sometimes, when we do not have the foresight to withdraw, God can push us into a stance of loneliness to better get our attention.

Third, get in the middle of God's will. Be active in doing what God wants you to do. Be honest with Him. Say, "Lord, I am alone. This happened. This other thing did not happen. I really thought things would turn out differently, but here I am, lonely and discouraged." When you are seeking to sit smack dab in the center of His will, it is here that He will let you in on what He has planned for you. Next, we are ready to move.

God says to Elijah, who thought he was totally alone, "*Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.*" (I Kings 19:18) See what happened? God pointed out to Elijah and opened his eyes to see that He was not keeping him alone. In fact, there were 7,000 other Israelites who would follow God with Elijah. Additionally, and perhaps more significantly, God brought him companionship. He introduced Elijah to Elisha, who would serve him and serve with him. This intimate companionship of the prophet and his successor was forged *after* the loneliness allowed Elijah to hear from God.

## Abraham Lincoln's Consecrated Loneliness

*“Oh, the loneliness of Lincoln, the tragic loneliness of that great life! Destined, in the very nature of his burden, to walk alone always— wherever he was, on frontier or in the Capital, the world pushed back—that into the stillness of the one life, upon whom such destiny depended, no influence should enter that came not laden with the wisdom of the Eternal One!”<sup>5</sup>*

Nathan William MacChesney

The year was 1862, and it arrived on a perfect morning in Washington D.C. that first day of January. As if to signify new beginnings, unseasonable sunshine bathed the city with a warm and hopeful glow. Women in spring bonnets dotted the streets amid the clapping of horse hooves and the laughter of children. The city had only been half complete before the War Between the States broke out. After that, the city began to grow and develop with the influx of the Union Troops. On the outskirts of the town, thousands of troops filled camps along the hillsides. They ran through military exercises, practiced formations, and were drilled by ranking U.S. generals. In contrast to their Confederate counterparts, this band of soldiers was untested. Some enlisted because they felt patriotic; some merely needed employment; others were idealists...but most all of these men were naive of war.

---

<sup>5</sup> MacChesney, Nathan William, ed., *Abraham Lincoln; The Tribute of a Century 1809-1909* (Coshocton: A.C. McClurg and Co., 1901).

In spite of the warmth and optimism of this New Year's Day, the landscape of the city told a truer story. The Capitol building was unfinished, with a framed dome precariously cantilevered over incomplete construction. Across a swampy bog a stump protruded – the unfinished Washington Monument – abandoned for lack of funds.

In closed chambers around town, talks of a despot filled the air. Some prophesied that the country was ripe for the rise of a dictator, while others began to see themselves as just the one for such an ascent to the top. Democracy was an unfinished plan... secession of the many and powerful southern states proved that.

But on the cusp of this New Year, all focus was on the Executive Mansion on Pennsylvania Avenue. Inside, the President and First Lady were preparing for a New Year's Day open house. It was a tradition for the citizenry to be welcomed inside their leader's residence on New Year's Day.

President Abraham Lincoln was a curious type. He was not conventionally handsome, nor was he in possession of the ego and self-importance that came as a standard feature of most in the upper echelons of leadership. Still, he was strong and stood erect, making eye contact with all who streamed through the doors to meet him: the rich and powerful, the poor and meek. History reports that he had a way of looking straight at someone, making them believe he was feeling their concerns; perhaps he was, this man so familiar with the challenges of life. Indeed, the

stream of Americans spanned the economic and social gamut – it is said that everyone from pickpockets to the men whose pockets were worth picking came that New Year’s Day to meet their elected leader and his wife. Many came to see the new president up close for the first time.

Make no mistake about it – this was not a constant human tide of Lincoln fans. Throughout the Union, backrooms swirled with rumors of coups and conspiracies. So the house at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue was opened that day to a motley crew of politicians, judges, military personnel, socialites, and curiosity seekers looking for a dose of entertainment, hope, camaraderie, and perhaps even information.

Biographers and historians have described this time in President Abraham Lincoln’s life as “isolated” and “solitary.” But Lincoln was no stranger to loneliness even before this fractured time in the history of his Presidency. Writing about his youth, he penned these words to describe himself, “...a strange, friendless, uneducated, penniless boy.” Later his law partner and biographer, William Herndon wrote, “He never had a confidant.” Yet another documented observation about the loneliness of this man was from an artist who studied him for a portrait. Remarking on Lincoln’s isolation, he wrote, “...remarkably pensive and tender, often inexpressibly sad, as if the reservoir of tears lay just beneath the surface.”

So why is Abraham Lincoln’s loneliness significant to us today? It is

significant because the time in history for which Lincoln's wisdom, experience, and character were called into service was the most significant time in the history of the United States. Our country was divided as never before. Torn from within, Lincoln emerged as a compassionate, thoughtful, and capable leader. He looked for ways to repair a war-torn and beleaguered nation, instead of ways to advance his own ambitions or power. He was the voice for the downtrodden and the liberator of the enslaved; but for a time, he was set apart – lonely and isolated in preparation for his duty.

Again, we see how God may allow a consecrated loneliness to prepare us for something of importance. God will wait until you are in a place to listen to Him. There, He will nurture and instruct you. God may be calling you to a place where He can give you an assignment that is going to challenge the best that you have in you. The giftedness that He has implanted in your heart will emerge, and you will step into the destiny of the next season of your life, at His service.

As Lincoln was marching toward his God-given directive to help heal a country once founded upon biblical principles, and to emancipate those enslaved on American soil, one biographer wrote this about his consecrated loneliness:

*“From beginning to end, in the preparation of Lincoln for the work that awaited him –and then again when the work was actually upon him, that he might be kept equal to its exactions –*

*he, too, was kept deeply enveloped in an atmosphere of aloneness. Alone as a boy, separated by tragedy from his father's companionship, and by poverty from the companionship of those who would have interested him; alone as a young man in an Indiana clearing, hearing no voice of neighbor for weeks at a time, except the distant ax as it fell in muffled notes in the woodland beyond; alone as a grown man, pathetically out of place between the barrels and the counter of a country store, patiently striving to find his place, as, buried in the grasses of the wide and lonely prairie, he lapped up every pool of knowledge on which he chanced—Euclid's Geometry, Clay's Speeches, Blackstone — devouring every book that came his way, simply from thirst for knowledge, without settled purpose, or settled order; alone as President—that one brain and that one heart charged with responsibility for each recurring phase of a mighty war, and for each recurring problem of the nation's peace, charged with responsibility to God and all mankind that free government should not perish from the earth.”<sup>6</sup>*

Elijah was set apart for a purpose of great significance. Abraham Lincoln was set apart for a time of great importance. Are you?

---

<sup>6</sup>MacChesney, Nathan William, ed., *Abraham Lincoln; The Tribute of a Century 1809-1909* (Coshocton: A.C. McClurg and Co., 1901).



If you believe that you are in a season of *consecrated* loneliness, remember the steps:

1. Rest.
2. Pour out your heart to God.
3. Seek to hear from God.
4. Be active in doing what God wants you to do.

## CHAPTER 3

### The ECHO of Loneliness

*“Language has created the word loneliness to express the pain of being alone, and the word solitude to express the glory of being alone.”*

Paul Tillich<sup>7</sup>

There is a distinct difference in being alone and being lonely. It is tragic to have existence only as you see yourself reflected in the eyes of others. We have to learn to be comfortable when we are alone. Some of us are not comfortable with being alone because when we are, we are not with someone we like or even respect – ourselves. Jean-Paul Sartre once said, “If you are lonely when you are alone, you are in bad company.”<sup>8</sup> I believe he is right, to some degree. I am a people person. I love being around people and as a pastor, you would think that I am in the people business. But as I found out early in my ministry, that notion is only half true. The other side of being a pastor is a very solitary experience. You see, each week, as I prepare to preach a sermon, I have to pull away from every distraction and get completely alone with God, His Word, and myself. Many days for the most part, I must be alone. As a young man, I fidgeted and pushed back from the solitude. But it was only in that stillness and solitary pursuit that

---

<sup>7</sup>Julie Yarbrough, *Inside the Broken Heart: Grief Understanding for Widows and Widowers* (Mustang: Tate Publishing and Enterprises, 2011).

<sup>8</sup><http://www.quotationsbook.com>.

I could hear the message God was impressing upon my heart. That message was not just for me, but also for other people...the people I longed to minister to and be around. Therefore, my aloneness earned me the togetherness I enjoyed so much.

Another thing I learned in the discipline of aloneness was that I have to be okay with myself in order for my time with God to be fruitful. Otherwise, one of two things happens. One, I become extremely fidgety and procrastinate because I have a restless and uneasy spirit. Or two, loneliness sets in. In either case, it is because I am not okay with myself, which usually indicates I am out of alignment with God.

The remedy is to go before God and to cry out to Him. I confess. I confess my feelings of irritability. I confess regrets I may have about my work week. I may talk to Him about relationship challenges. I confess the things that are pressing in on my conscience, making me not so fond of myself. Once I have confessed and repented, I am much more at ease with myself. At that point, the loneliness and the procrastination evaporate and His presence fills the space. Then and only then can I stretch my spiritual muscles to full capacity. There is no loneliness or self-flagellation when I am basking in His presence.

Do you want to like the one you are alone with? Go to God and confess your feelings, failures, and frustrations. He will take you in His arms. Isaiah 40:11 reassures us, "He tends his flock like a shepherd: *He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart.*" (ESV)

## **E: Emotional Loneliness**

*“When musing on companions gone, we feel ourselves doubly alone.”*

Sir Walter Scott<sup>9</sup>

There can be situations or seasons in our lives when we are fine with who we are...in fact, we quite like ourselves; but a gnawing loneliness still nips at our heels. This loneliness does not seem to be *consecrated*, a metaphorical Juniper tree shading us from the harsh elements, ushering in a time of rest and preparation. Instead, there is a persistent ache which does not abate even when we are among other people. These are what I call the ECHOs of loneliness. The first echo is *emotional* loneliness.

Usually, emotional loneliness comes with a change in our lives, a shift in the way we are used to living. I remember one lonely time in my past. I had heard the call of God on my life and I left the University of Alabama and the “tide” of fun, friendships and familiarity of my freshman year. At Alabama, there was never a dull moment. I am naturally energetic and gregarious and the university life suited me just fine. But since I was serious about the ministry, I transferred to a small Baptist school in Mississippi to pursue my studies and calling. The first two weeks were nothing like the first two weeks at the University of Alabama. I did not know a soul. People seemed very serious

---

<sup>9</sup>*The Complete Works of Sir Walter Scott: With a Biography, and His Last Additions and Illustrations*, Volume I. (New York: Conner Cook, Franklin Buildings, 1833).

and very religious. Remember, this was a new pursuit for me. So I called home, looking for some comfort. In my loneliness, I told my mother, "This is a terrible place. I don't fit in at all. It's a bunch of super-religious people, and all this ministry stuff is a new deal for me." But three years and many friends later, I looked back on Mississippi College days as three of the happiest years of my life. It proved to be a very exciting, rewarding, fulfilling and wonderful little school.

Emotional loneliness can occur when we change jobs and arrive at work with no one to talk to, to joke around with, or to sit with at lunch. I mentioned my time at college, but younger children experience emotional loneliness as well. Starting at a new school, or having a friend move away can cause a disruption in a young child's life that ushers in loneliness.

Death and divorce are brutal life changes that fling the door wide open for emotional loneliness. I have counseled many spouses who suffer the loss of their mate, yet have a house full of raucous kids. Time after time I have listened as a divorced woman tells me how lonely she is even while performing all of the duties of a single mom. Big, strapping men have cried in my office as they regale stories of how silent and stark their home seems when they return from work to find no woman's touch, no boisterous kids, and no aromas of food and fellowship wafting through the house.

Death is perhaps the cruelest culprit of emotional loneliness. A friend of mine lost

her mother quite unexpectedly. She said that she feels “mother-lonely.” This is an emotional loneliness that only one person in the world can fill. And that person is gone. So, though my friend is not a lonely person, she does have an emotional loneliness that stems from a sudden loss, a sudden change in her life.

Emotional loneliness is different from social loneliness in that emotional loneliness often stems from a broken attachment like death or divorce. Social loneliness of all kinds can be mitigated by new social connections. However, emotional loneliness is only remedied by integrating a new attachment into your life.<sup>10</sup>

Though the emotional toll from this kind of loneliness is heavy, emotional loneliness is usually temporary. As we settle into our new situation – school, singleness, new job, widowhood, life without a loved one – new opportunities and new seasons of life emerge and the acute loneliness abates.

There is another category of emotional loneliness that is often summed up with this statement: lonely even in a crowd. Does this resonate with you? I am talking about an inner longing for connectivity that only you know about. Often this kind of emotional loneliness wears a mask. Behind the mask may be the college freshman who lives in a dormitory full of people, but has connected with no one. His parents call and hear noise in the background and ask how things are

---

<sup>10</sup> J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, fourth ed. (New York: Springer Publishing, 2009).

going. “Busy!” he says. Because he is – with classes and studying and trying to fit in. His unsuspecting parents have dinner with friends who inquire about the university student. “We barely hear from him! We call him and it sound like chaos in the dorm. He is just soooo busy.” And yet he is painfully, privately, lonely.

Sometimes we must take the first steps. We must be intentional about rejoining life and community in new and unfamiliar ways. Let’s look at each of the examples of emotional loneliness we talked about.

**1. Situation:** Starting a new school, new job, or new town.

**Solutions:**

- Get involved.
- Volunteer for an organization at school, or within the community.
- Find a Bible-based church, which is always one of the first steps I would take if I moved anywhere new. Seek community within a body of fellow believers.
- As you reach out to others, more opportunities for friendships will organically multiply.

**2. Situation:** Divorce. Divorce is such a unique situation in terms of loneliness. I have counseled countless individuals – both those who did not want the divorce and those who did – and each expresses bouts of painful loneliness.

**Solutions:**

- Divorce recovery workshops are offered at many churches and

community centers. If you are in the Houston area, our church offers it free of charge.

- Look for divorce support groups in your local area.
- Call upon friends who have been in your situation. Be sure to look to those who have come out of their divorce as healthy individuals with hope and joy. Do not seek advice or counsel from those you view as crippled from the event.
- Talk to your pastor, and ask for additional recommendations from him.
- Keep moving. You will find almost everyone you know has come in contact with a divorce in a very real way. The statistics are high, but healing is available to those who truly work to move on.

### **3. Situation:** Death of a loved one.

#### **Solutions:**

- Recall other people in your life who have suffered such a monumental loss. Reach out to them. Call and ask, "How did you do it?" This call will often open up a two-way communication with someone who has walked a mile in your shoes. A new awareness will emerge from the person who has gone through a similar circumstance. Often, this person will become a keen ally in helping



- you forge through your grief.
- Many churches, ours included, offer support groups. These groups meet regularly and offer immediate fellowship and support with a group of people who are struggling through grief together.
  - Get up. Get dressed. Get moving... do not allow emotional loneliness to compound into chronic loneliness.

## C: Chronic Loneliness

*“We are all sentenced to solitary confinement  
inside our own skins, for life.”*

Tennessee Williams<sup>11</sup>

Another ECHO is heard in chronic loneliness. This loneliness can become debilitating. It is the state of *always* feeling lonely. While this is a very painful state of existence, I am going to be quite blunt about some of my observations. Often, the chronically lonely people whom I have met are doom-and-gloom types. You know the type – Debbie Downers or Negative Neds. They seem to walk with a black cloud over their heads.

In spite of good news, or abundant blessings, they see the glass as half empty. If they get a good report from the doctor, they worry that the doctor missed something. If they win a million dollars, they complain about how much tax will be taken out. The old cartoon Lil’ Abner had a character called *Mr. Pfffff*. He was a little guy who walked around with a black cloud over his head. I think I have met him many times over the years in my ministry and among friends.

I like positive people, men and women who seem excited to see me when we meet. I like it when people are energetic and genuinely happy to be alive. Don’t you? Think about the people with whom you like to be and spend time. Are they fun? Kind? Easy-to-

---

<sup>11</sup>Tennessee Williams, *Orpheus Descending: A Play in Three Acts*. 1957.

be-with? Or are they calculating, critical, and down-and-out?

Often, chronically lonely people have a critical spirit. They are always criticizing others and then wonder why no one wants to be around them. A critical spirit is one of the surest ways to keep you alienated from others. Kindness and cheerfulness make up for a multitude of other shortcomings.

Another characteristic of chronically lonely people may be their inability to become victorious over an event in their lives. Bitterness sets in, and the event redefines the person. I know a woman whose husband committed adultery and caused a huge scandal among their church, their social network, and of course their family. He was wrong. Let me emphasize, he committed an egregious sin. However, this woman has become biting and sarcastic in almost any interaction you have with her. She has let her physical appearance go downhill. Her hurt and her anger have become so apparent to others that she has become a pariah. People dread spending time with her. Worse still, she harps on her ex-husband to her children, creating an environment of hostility and bitterness for her kids. If they agree with her, they have no relationship with their dad. If they want to see their dad, she cries, “traitors!”

Initially, her husband sinned, but now she is the one who is wallowing in the stench and bitterness of unforgiveness. And the stench is keeping people away! She is a chronically bitter and lonely person – defined by a life-event that she has never gotten over.

A wonderful example of someone who was triumphant over the threat of chronic loneliness was Corrie Ten Boom, author of *The Hiding Place*. As a teen, she fell in love with a young man. She loved this boy with all her heart. He seemed to return the feelings. However, his parents expected him to marry a girl from a certain social class. Believing that he would overcome his parent's influence, Corrie hoped for a different outcome. However, he became engaged to another young lady, someone of the "proper social standing." Upon hearing the news, a heartbroken Corrie flung herself onto her bed and wept. Her father entered the room and gently told Corrie that she was a victim of love being blocked. He told her she could do one of two things. One, she could kill the love and reject the pain. He warned that in doing so, she would kill a little bit of her heart as well. Or, she could take the love that she had for her beloved and release it to others everywhere she went. She chose the latter. Little did the Ten Booms know at that time, Corrie would become an ambassador of love to millions of people through her inordinate ability to love the unlovable, and to shine Christ's light in the darkest of places: World War II, Germany.

The chronic loneliness I have described can apply to Christ followers or unbelievers. You see, we were created for fellowship with our Heavenly Father. Within the context of this relationship, we not only have a family of fellow believers – brothers and sisters in Christ – but we also have a personal relationship with the Father and

His Son, Jesus. The unique kind of emptiness that plagues the chronically lonely person is expressed well by Blaise Pascal, who famously said that all mankind has “a God-shaped hole in his heart.”

Without the indwelling of Jesus within the heart, chronic loneliness may not abate. People suffering from this kind of loneliness find themselves anxiety prone. Restlessness and inability to find peace are the hallmarks for this ailment. Chronically lonely people may be physically restless, or restless in different walks of life. Perhaps they continually change jobs – looking for that perfect fit. Career changes are common – they start an entirely different career over and over again.

These people may also have constant relationship trouble. The trouble can take one of two directions. One direction is the inability to commit. They do not stay in long-term relationships because no person can ever satisfy their lonely and restless heart. When the warm feelings are gone, the chronically lonely assume their partner is not right for them...and so they move on in search of the one who can fill their hearts.

The other direction a chronically lonely person may take is a rush to the altar. You know – the proverbial serial bride. So, though she does not struggle with commitment, the commitment does not stick for long. For example, she falls in love, feels less lonely, attaches to her mate through marriage, but eventually finds herself disappointed, lonely and restless...and she wants out. She then quickly finds another person that helps

keep the loneliness at bay, and she marries this person. However, her new groom is human and cannot fill her God-shaped hole, so he fails, and she divorces him.

Once again, this woman finds herself alone and starts to hope that the next person she falls in love with will be “the one.” I am reminded of screen legend Elizabeth Taylor, who after eight marriages made the statement, “I’m a very committed wife. I should be committed, too – for being married so many times.”<sup>12</sup>

The loneliness that comes from relying on another person to be the escape from loneliness will always come back. No human being can fill the space that was created for relationship with God. It is a losing battle.

All kinds of other remedies for this lonely ailment have been tried to no avail – drugs, alcohol, pornography, shopping, entertainment, work, business, sports, relationships, sex, travel, pets...and on and on the list goes. But when the hole is God-shaped, nothing else can quite fill the space.

We need a Savior to save us from this particular type of chronic loneliness...an emptiness that lingers long after all of the self-prescribed treatments have lost their efficacy.

We have looked at the reasons for chronic loneliness, but defining the problem does not ensure a cure. Let me suggest some practical steps to shine light into the shadows within the chronically lonely heart.

---

<sup>12</sup> [www.kveo.com/news/elizabeth-taylor-dies](http://www.kveo.com/news/elizabeth-taylor-dies).

**1. Situation:** A person becomes known as a Debbie Downer or Negative Ned - a social pariah. No one wants to be around the huffing and puffing and toxicity of these people.

**Solutions:** If this sounds familiar – stop!

- Use some simple tricks to change what you say to others. For instance, speak the opposite of what you are thinking. Let me give you an example: You *think*, “It is blazing hot outside, I hate this weather.” Instead you *say*, “Sunny days can make the sky look so blue!”
- Begin a practice and a discipline of making positive statements. This discipline will become a habit if you persevere.

**2. Situation:** You are disgusted with a family member or co-worker. You cannot wait to say something about them to another person.

**Solution:**

- WAIT! Apply the same discipline from the above example and make a complimentary remark, instead.

**3. Situation:** The inability to overcome a momentous life event.

**Solutions:**

- Begin by saying the opposite of what you feel.
- Engage in the present.
- Become intentional about making new memories and creating

scenarios that will bring joy into your life.

- Volunteer at local charities or your church.
- If travel interests you, book a trip.
- Use your gifts and talents to reach out to other people. If you can bake...take an elderly neighbor a cake, or take someone in a similar situation cookies because you know what they are going through. If you are adept at a school subject, find tutoring possibilities for children who need extra help with schoolwork.
- Engage with people in a positive way and forge a path through your future, unencumbered by your painful past.

**4. Situation:** Empty place only God can fill.

**Solutions:**

- The solution to a chronically lonely person who seeks to find fulfillment in others is two-fold – **release and return.**
  1. First, release the unrealistic expectation you may have placed on people to meet needs that only God can meet. Releasing people of these unhealthy expectations and obligations brings freedom to relationships, and relationships blossom best in freedom.



2. Second, return to God as your source of life. Imagine your life like a gas tank. If we turn to people to fill us up, we will always feel dry, and we will drain them in the process. But if we turn to God, daily, we turn to the One who is the Fount of Living Water. (John 7:38) His ability to fill our tank is never ending.

## H: Habitual Loneliness

*“What torments my soul is its loneliness. The more it expands among friends and the daily habits or pleasures, the more, it seems to me, it flees me and retires into its fortress.”*

Eugene Delacroix<sup>13</sup>

Some people get into the habit of loneliness. They do not intentionally isolate themselves or withdraw. However, each and every opportunity to engage with other people is habitually refused. I have seen this over the years with workaholics. They work, and grind, and strive. They give up weekends, evenings, and holidays. Always working, always achieving, always busy, busy, busy. This person is never available for a spontaneous dinner. He is not someone you can call to grab coffee or perhaps a movie. You would never pop in to his home unannounced. There is a rigidity to his lifestyle that does not invite friendly intrusion. And one day...he wakes up and realizes he is lonely.

Does this sound familiar? Are you teetering on the precipice of falling into this category? As the work hours pile-up, and the invitations for recreation go down, take a good hard look at the risk-reward analysis. Are you stockpiling success with no opportunity to enjoy the benefits? Will you be alone at the top of the ladder? Remember Charles Dickens' novel, *A Christmas Carol*? In the end, Ebenezer

---

<sup>13</sup>Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, *From the Classicists to the Impressionists: Art and Architecture in the 19th Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

Scrooge was wealthy and alone. As he peered through windows on the cold Christmas night of the story, he longed for the warmth of a hearth surrounded by friends and family. Life had gone on all around him. While he toiled and griped, all of the people for whom he had developed disdain – those who did not work as hard as he did – seemed quite content with their lives, their fellowships, their standards of living, and their relationships.

Set in the blustery cold of a December night in old London Towne, amid the backdrop of all of Charles Dickens' descriptors, it is easy to recognize the obvious pitfalls of Ebenezer's choices. He counted his money while others counted their blessings. He was crotchety and walked with a stoop. His name even sounded painfully grumpy. But would we recognize this character with a name like Brandon or Amy? Would we be able to see this person's features through the *iPhone* that seems permanently glued to Amy's ear or the *iPad* Brandon always has open in front of him?

What if this person is not crotchety, but instead is always, "on?" You know the type – he plays golf on the weekend, but his foursome consists of himself and three clients. Or perhaps someone like "Amy" allows herself a little shopping time on the weekend, but eschews the notion of hanging out at the mall with friends in lieu of making a surgical strike on her favorite store to pick up a few more business suits and work clothes. *Everything* is about work – except for sleep – and I'll bet there is very little of that.

Just like Ebenezer Scrooge, Brandon

and Amy will find themselves in a nightmare: alone at the top of the ladder, isolated by their drive to accomplish...*what?*

I have also known people who habitually turn down invitations. For instance, perhaps a chronically lonely woman attends a Bible study class. The class may extend an invite to go see a movie, but she refuses...not the show she would have chosen. Another acquaintance calls and asks her to watch his pets over the weekend, but she claims she is allergic to dogs. A group of ladies decide to go Christmas shopping together and invite her. She does not like to shop. In her constant refusal for fellowship, she begins to discourage future invitations. No criteria for companionship seems to ever measure up. She finds herself busy most of the time, but socially, she is lonely. On a Saturday afternoon she wonders what most people are doing. As evening falls, she sits with her computer alone in a coffee shop as groups of people bustle in chattering and laughing. They order drinks and leave together. It looks like fun...wherever they are going. The camaraderie *sounds* so cheerful. Alone, she sips her coffee, feeling the loneliness spread through her like the warm liquid she drinks, until it reaches the pit of her stomach. Her habit of refusing others has ceased...because the invitations don't come anymore. Everyone knows she will have an excuse, so they avoid her rejection and simply don't call. She is in the habit of loneliness and she has no idea how she got there.

If you have dug a moat around yourself and filled it with excuses, build a

bridge. Let's look at some ways to re-engage in the outside world and leave loneliness behind.

**1. Situation:** Workaholics.

**Solutions:**

- Reprioritize. If you have friends and family, make them your priority. Make a new commitment to them TODAY.
- Practice better time management. Work through lunch if it means getting home earlier.
- Turn off your cell phone at home and at dinner with friends. Yes, you can. (Remember when we could call someone's home and no one would answer or we got a busy signal? It simply meant the person was unavailable!)
- Become unavailable...in a healthy way.

**2. Situation:** Chronic excuse-maker.

This person makes excuses to have no interaction with others, and then finds himself or herself isolated and lonely.

**Solutions:**

- Stretch yourself. Go to a movie you are not interested in, but enjoy the companionship of the group. Accept *all* invitations for a while to get back on the list of your friends whom you have perpetually turned down.
- Volunteer. Be the one who is always ready to help. This will get your phone ringing! As you establish

yourself as someone willing to pitch in on all kind of projects – you will be called on!

- And lastly, if you have been the one to turn down invitations, extend one. Start creating social opportunities for a group of your friends. Reverse the opinion of others by reversing your actions.

## **O: Obliging Loneliness**

*“When people are lonely, they stoop to any  
companionship.”*

Lew Wallace<sup>14</sup>

Obliging loneliness plagues people who are constantly trying to become someone they are not to earn love. They are chameleons that change with the environment of each new relationship, each new friendship, and each new social situation. They transform to be accepted, but they are never really known for their true selves. This leads to further alienation and loneliness because their lives and their relationships are not authentic. This person can never experience true community, because they are not transparent.

This brand of loneliness masquerades as something different. From the outside, an individual suffering from obliging loneliness can look like a very popular person. Obliging loneliness is a loneliness that is locked in a private chamber, surrounded by plenty of people. Often, this person is part of many social groups at the same time, or perhaps a close-knit elite group, with whom our lonely friend spends all of his or her time. Regardless, other people are not the issue with this brand of loneliness. Social invitations are plentiful. Our obligingly lonely friend may have several roommates or perhaps a spouse. BUT NO ONE REALLY KNOWS HIM (OR HER).

---

<sup>14</sup><http://quotationsbook.com>

An example of obliging loneliness is found in the person who never lets anybody “in.” Fear of being known for whom one really is can create a loneliness that is so private and so undetectable to outsiders that most people would be shocked to know this person has experienced loneliness of any kind. Obliging loneliness can appear in the form of a good listener, someone who probes to understand more about *your* problems, *your* circumstances, your needs. Or perhaps obliging loneliness looks more like the person who is the life of the party, yet a master deflector. She is the girl who is invited to every wedding, every party, and receives hundreds of Christmas cards every year; yet no one knows when she has a cold or the flu.

An obligingly lonely person covers. Any threat of someone getting too close to knowing or even getting a peek at the real person and you're off the scent. Perhaps this is the friend who always changes the subject to *you* – which actually feels pretty good for a while. However, after time and many, many encounters with this friend, you realize you know absolutely nothing about him. This friend is often the best man at a series of weddings. Yet, he is perpetually single. A great friend, godfather, designated driver...he is “on call” for everyone. Are you surprised that he may be at all times the loneliest guy in the room? No one knows him. He makes sure of it. He becomes the friend, the uncle, the hero in all of your circumstances, and yet, you have absolutely no idea what he is going through in his life...ever.



What is the missing element in the obligingly lonely guy I just described? It is intimacy. Think of the word this way: in-to-me-see. Ah, yes transparency. Intimacy is a wonderful emotional element of relationships – that comfortable state of “knowing” and “being known.” The other echoes of loneliness do not lack this ingredient. In fact, often, emotional loneliness is so painful because the person with whom intimacy was shared is gone. But obligingly lonely people struggle with intimacy. A mandatory ingredient for intimacy is vulnerability. The obligingly lonely person usually dodges any risk of vulnerability. Other crucial elements in establishing intimacy with someone are mutuality and understanding. But without self-disclosure, there can be no intimacy. The one-sidedness of the relationships I described infers that there is no mutuality. Because no transparency is exhibited, relationships often are very one-sided.

Again, this particular type of loneliness is not easily recognizable because social opportunities and acquaintances abound. But after closer inspection, we see that this person is always the server. Someone who incessantly serves others but asks for nothing in return. The upside? He never has to reveal anything about himself...others are all too happy to be on the receiving end. And he likes it that way.

Another brand of obliging loneliness is the chameleon. I knew a lovely woman who could be the poster child for this obliging loneliness. She met a great guy in college; we

will call him “Joe.” She decided she wanted to marry him and set out to do so. In her mind, she created what she thought Joe wanted as his ideal wife, and she became her. She recreated her history and conformed her present to his ideal. He liked to hunt; she liked to cook game. He preferred the mountains to the beach; she tossed her swimsuit and made the hot chocolate. He loved football...she cheered louder. They married and she set out to create the perfect life. They were blessed with beautiful, healthy children and abundant prosperity. But somewhere along the way, the facade began to crack. This precious woman was an impostor in her own life. She spoke, dressed, and behaved a certain way that she perceived her husband wanted. But she was completely alone inside.

A church member shared a story with me about another young woman who was such a chameleon that she took on the likes and dislikes of any group with whom she associated. If she was around her church friends, she was the holiest of the group. If she was with a worldlier group, she could out-drink them. She actually took on the “colors” of any group with whom she associated.

This woman did not overtly profess her Christian faith to the group of partyers, nor did she suggest that perhaps she was not in full agreement with the moral guidelines of her Christian friends when she was with them. She morphed into the shape that each group resembled. She was a very lonely woman. Obliging loneliness plagued her life. I’m told that she lived in a house with three roommates,

but felt lonely even at home because of her inability to be authentic.

I remember my college days and bunking with roommates. We quickly got to know each other's likes and dislikes. We knew what kind of music each other liked, our taste in food, even the kind of girl each of us wanted to date. But this woman seemed to be a mystery to her roommates. Because of her lack of transparency, her constant insecurity disrupted the household. The "show" that she put on for the outside world continued at home. Feelings of isolation and betrayal were her constant companions. One roommate actually confided that she wanted to get away from her because she could not get a grip on what this lonely girl was really like. The "not knowing" sparked distrust and created an awkward and uncomfortable living environment.

From afar, it is easy to see that the obligingly lonely girl was crying out, "I'll be whomever you want me to be, just love me." But mere humans should not have the responsibility of creating an identity for someone else. That job belongs to the Creator – to God. His workmanship defines us (Psalm 139:13-14), and His Son's precious blood purchased us (1 Corinthians 6:20). You see, our friend who longed to fit in did belong... she just *did* not know to Whom.

The danger of obliging loneliness is that the loneliness can become so isolating that we seek an alternative way to abate the emptiness. Addictions of all kinds are a common "fix" and ultimately turn the prison

of loneliness into the hell of addiction. Most addicts will tell you that the shame, pain, and incessant demands of any addiction create one of the loneliest existences on earth.

While all obligingly lonely people do not suffer from substance addiction, they do seem to suffer from approval addiction. The need to find approval and acceptance from others creates a barrier to intimacy. The Merriam-Webster dictionary definition of *approval* is, “The belief that someone or something is good or acceptable.” We can get too caught up in trying to convince others to “believe that we are good or acceptable.” The following is a quick checklist to help you discover if you are struggling with approval.

- Before you make a decision, you consider what other people will think.
- Your mood can change based on the response you get from someone else.
- You often say “yes” to people even though you would *prefer* to say “no.”
- Other people’s opinions of you drive you to change.
- You strive to be like “\_\_\_\_\_.”  
(You fill in the blank – any person other than yourself.)
- You apologize often and habitually.
- You change your convictions easily when someone you respect offers a differing opinion.
- You experience stress and guilt if you do something of which someone doesn’t approve.
- You are running a PR campaign in your head at all times – putting

a good spin on yourself for public consumption.

If more than a few on this list sound familiar, approval may be an issue with which you find yourself in a constant struggle. Always needing and seeking the approval of others is a very lonely place. We will always let someone else down. Bill Cosby famously said, “I don’t know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everyone.” He’s right! It can’t be done, and striving for that approval hollows out a very lonely place.

So what are the steps to take to break out of this obliging loneliness? Let’s look at a few.

**1. Situation:** The Good Listener – this person always changes the subject to other people. This obligingly lonely person never takes the opportunity to unburden his own problems or to share his likes, dislikes, dreams, or challenges. Always invited and always liked, this person seems to have plenty of friends. This lonely person actually has a full social calendar – but may be home alone with the flu and no one knows it. Are you this person?

**Solutions:**

- Push past the fear of rejection. A good starting point is to look for a small group in your church. This group should not be a big Bible study, but a small, intimate group of the same gender. Begin by opening up at prayer request time.
- Look for opportunities to create or

join an accountability group, as you progress. This group should be very small, trustworthy and dedicated to regular meetings. Within the confines of this group, accountability for each other's faith walk is challenged and refined.

**2. Situation:** The Chameleon – a person who changes with the environment or each new relationship, hoping to garner acceptance and love.

**Solutions:**

- Know who you are, and become comfortable with it. Begin adapting by reading Psalm 139. This is the best description of being completely and totally known. The Psalmist is describing how totally God knows us. He knows every move we make, every thought we have, and every word we are going to say before it is even on our lips. God's Word is a very intentional work our Father in Heaven uses to communicate with His children. I firmly believe that Psalm 139 was written to assure people just like you that you ARE known, and you are ACCEPTED.

Psalm 139 contains a very intriguing little verse that states, "*You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made....*" (Psalm 139:13-14)

Do you get that? You are the deliberate handiwork of the Most High God. He knit you together. He

patterned and decided your attributes, physical characteristics, personality traits, skills, and gifts. He created you. You are unlike anyone else He has ever made or will ever make again. You are purposefully unique. God did not create you to be just like your best friend, or your version of the ideal mate. You are, or will be the ideal mate for the man or woman God created you to marry. But morphing into someone else is never His plan. It adulterates His creative process of making you just as you are.

- Can you accept this truth? Begin by forming a habit of reading Psalm 139 every night for 21 days. Research tells us that a habit is formed in 21 days. So I want to challenge you to make Psalm 139 a habit. Read it nightly before you go to bed. Then prayerfully ask God to impress the words freshly upon your heart. I want it to become indelible.

**3. Situation:** Approval Addiction – If you looked at the list and saw several points that sounded like yourself, we need to get you weaned off the approval of man and redirected to the acceptance, approval, and love that are found in Christ.

**Solutions:**

Break free from the bondage of what other people think about you and replace it with the certainty that you are approved by God, the only One fit to

judge you.

**Step 1:** Rest in the knowledge that God's approval is always **received** and not earned. How many of us struggle to please God instead of man? "*Now that we have God's approval by faith, we have peace with God because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done.*" (Romans 5:1 God's Word Translation) This translation articulates how our approval, or the more often used term, *justification*, is gifted to us by the work Jesus did on the cross. Therefore, we do not have to do anything to earn God's approval if we have accepted Christ. Unlike man's approval, it is a done deal, not an ever-moving finish line.

**Step 2:** Now meditate upon the scripture from Step 1, Romans 5:1. Meditate means to read and reread. Say it aloud. Let the words seep into your heart. Personalize it: "*Now that I, Edwin, have God's approval by faith, I have peace with God because of what my Lord Jesus Christ has done.*"

As you meditate and personalize this truth, pray that God will show you how much you are loved and approved.

**Step 3:** Practice speaking the truth in love. This may mean saying "no" when you are expected to say, "yes." "*Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still*



*trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (Galatians 1:10 NIV)*

**Step 4:** Trust God to give you authentic relationships. Begin to pray that you will have friendships and connections to people who will appreciate the real you.

**Step 5:** Have the courage to emerge! Take a step forward. Start showing others the real *you*.

## CONCLUSION

### Silencing the Echoes of Loneliness

*“God makes a home for the lonely; He leads  
out the prisoners into prosperity...”*

Psalm 68:6a

Loneliness can be caused by all kinds of situations in our lives. As you finish reading this booklet, my prayer is that you realize feeling lonely does not signify a lack of faith. We saw in Matthew 1:22-23 that even Jesus experienced loneliness at times. Perhaps the realization that Jesus knows exactly how you are feeling will comfort you.

My suggestion is to prayerfully analyze the loneliness you are experiencing. Into which category does it fit? Could this season of your life be one of consecrated loneliness? Have you been thrust into a situation where God can minister to you, restore you, and prepare you for a new call into His service? Perhaps He is preparing you for a new job, a new relationship, a new project, or a new aspect of ministry. Carefully examine your heart and prayerfully determine if this loneliness is consecrated for a higher purpose.

If you are convinced that this is a purposed loneliness, follow the steps in the book: rest, pour out your heart to God, seek to hear from Him, and then get ready to spring into the action He is calling you to do.

But, if the loneliness you are experiencing seems to echo in your heart from another place, I encourage you to be proactive. Take the steps found in this booklet

to push back the loneliness and to walk in victory. Loneliness can be a prison. Within the confines of this isolated place, pain and sadness echo off the walls. Everything seems to be a reminder of the lonely and forgotten place in which you find yourself. An inner voice reverberates through the chambers of your heart, “*You’re alone, ...lone, ...lone, ... lone. Forgotten, ...gotten, ...gotten, ...gotten.*”

You must silence the echo! Take charge of that inner voice and take charge of your circumstances. This book gives you some practical steps to get you going in the right direction. Combine these actions with prayer and your own creativity to forge a path into a new season of fellowship and fruitfulness in your life.

As the Psalmist says, “*God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity....*” (Psalm 68:6a) If God has not consecrated this time for you, rest in the knowledge He created you for fellowship and will help you find that path. As He said in Genesis 2:18, “*It is not good for man to be alone.*” As human beings, we are wired for relationships because we are made in the image of God who is relational. Our desire to be in community is God given. As I stated in the beginning, I believe our isolation and separation from fellowship is a work of the evil one who came to steal, to kill, and to destroy. (John 10:10)

I am praying that each person who reads this booklet will experience freedom from the prison of loneliness. Remember that, as relational beings, God created us with the

tools to overcome lonely seasons and situations in our lives. Within the pages of this little book, there are some practical suggestions to remind you of the resources you already possess: prayer, giftedness, positive attitudes, and the Body of Christ. Get ready my friend. You can do this! Reach *into* yourself, reach *out* to others and reach *up* “to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us!” (Ephesians 3: 20-21 NIV)

If you would like to know more about additional resources from The Winning Walk with Dr. Ed Young, please contact:



the **winning** walk

PO Box 1414  
Houston, TX 77251

[1-800-946-9255](tel:1-800-946-9255)

[winningwalk.org](http://winningwalk.org)

[Sign-up to receive Dr. Young's daily devotional email.](#)

