

NAVIGATING ALONENESS

Psalm 69:20 ... "Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none."

First of all, read this devotional's title carefully. We are not specifically talking today about loneliness, which in most instances is the product of self-pity and can even, in severe situations, be a sin. Aloneness is more difficult to avoid than loneliness. For the purposes of this lesson we will define aloneness as being alone without others you know, nearby. Loneliness is what happens when you submit to the dark emotions of being alone and let it warp your outlook on life. Sometimes, being alone is simply unavoidable and we must be careful not to allow aloneness to become loneliness.

I know several reading this who suffer from occasional or even chronic loneliness. I have been there. I understand. I have spent much of my life alone and I often handled that poorly, leaving me with intense feelings of loneliness. That is why I learned many years ago not to say trite things like, "Jesus wants to be your friend," or "You have no reason to be lonely if you are a Christian." While these sayings are indeed truthful, often times the best way to console or comfort another is to say nothing. Hug them. Sit with them. Listen to them. But your best comfort might be in remaining silent.

Aloneness can occur when you are truly alone or even when you are in a crowd. One of the hardest things for a single person to experience is being with a group of couples or married folks. Singles are often kindly invited to join such groups, but it can be very awkward and uncomfortable for the single person. To be among people who have happy relationships, just illuminates even more brightly your own state of aloneness. Aloneness breeds mixed emotions that can make dealing with it even more difficult. For instance, when I was single, I often felt guilty by going someplace nice alone, like a mountain lake or the beach, because I was not sharing the experience with someone else. I rarely went to restaurants for dinner for the same reason. Much of the time, I convinced myself that I deserved to be alone, so I stayed home...alone. Your mind can twist things all out of normality when you let your emotions overwhelm you.

If you experience aloneness often enough that it begins to warp your thinking and stirs up emotions that are not helpful, such as depression, the best advice I have is found in today's scripture. It is King David's admission that he was looking for others to encourage him and, finding none, he succumbed to self-pity. Confession is always a good place to start in your journey to return to a healthy attitude, followed by asking the Lord to forgive you for sinking into unhelpful thoughts, then asking him to influence you with positive thoughts. I do not want to trivialize this process, nor tell you to "Just get over it." It is difficult. However, the upside of the process is that it will help you mature in your relationship with Christ who, over time, will reveal his sufficiency for you.

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