

STEP FOUR: LIVING LONELY OR LIVING IN LOVE



Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help. (Hebrews 4:15-16 MSG)

Loneliness is a feeling of isolation which is felt even when others are around us. It's a sense

that others have their own agenda and continue to carry on with what they are doing, having no idea or even caring about what we are thinking, or what we are coping with on the inside. Other symptoms of loneliness are feelings of lack of involvement with others or with what is happening around us. Loneliness and loss of hope are often triggered by rejection, tragedy, separation, a sense of abandonment by God and/or others, or a feeling of not being understood. Mother Teresa said “Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty”.

God told them, “I’ve never quit loving you and never will. Expect love, love, and more love!” (Jeremiah 31:3 MSG)

There are two primary forms of loneliness that people suffer from:

1. **Social loneliness** – brought on by a lack of understanding in family relationships and/or a non-existent social network.
2. **Emotional loneliness** – the absence of a close loving relationship. Acquaintances may help with social loneliness but emotional health requires love and a committed caring relationship.

God made us to be in loving relationship with Him and with each other. When our relationship with God, our Heavenly Father, is broken we are not being nurtured each day by His unfailing love. When we are starved of the love of God by our own self-will, we are unable to receive love or give love to others.

When we draw near to God, and choose to be filled up each day with His love, then we are on our way to being emotionally healthy.

For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.” (Zephaniah 3:17 NLT)

EFFECTS OF LONELINESS:

1. Loneliness can lead to immoral relationships. Sharing life with friends is a natural yearning of the human heart. Often when we are lonely and disconnected, we seek sexual intimacy and use live-in relationships that are less than a life-time marriage commitment, to fill the gap. However, all the physical or sexual contact in the world cannot fill an empty, lonely heart. We long for relationship in commitment. Our hearts yearn to be cared for and to be understood. Close intimacy in a committed loving relationship brings satisfaction and contentment to both participants. Nothing else truly satisfies.

There’s more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact. As written in Scripture, “The two become one.” Since we want to become spiritually one with the Master, we must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever—the kind of sex that can

never “become one.” (1 Corinthians 6:16-17 MSG)

2. *Loneliness can impact our finances.* Often when we are lonely, we believe that purchasing certain items will give us an emotional lift. We buy things we don't need. We spend money we don't have. The brief pleasure of the items purchased fades into an even deeper level of meaninglessness when the bill arrives. Tools and toys were not designed to meet the needs of our hearts.

You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. (Psalm 145:16 NIV)

3. *Loneliness can damage our self-esteem.* We doubt our worth to God and others. We feel solitary and hopeless. Loneliness distorts our self-esteem which may have the effect of leading us into bondage to others. Lonely people often try to please others so that they will be accepted. They may even allow others to abuse them just because they want to be in a relationship. God offers us a loving relationship with Himself. When we experience that right relationship, we will be healthy enough to establish loving relationships with others.

I want you woven into a tapestry of love, in touch with everything there is to know of God. Then you will have minds confident and at rest, focused on Christ, God's great mystery. (Colossians 2:2-3 MSG)

Seeking a Godly mentor and developing a healthy relationship with that person is another way of alleviating loneliness. Revealing what goes on inside us to a trustworthy person will help us connect with our innermost being. Joining in church fellowship is another way to feel connected, both with God and with others. Coming to terms with the loneliness we are experiencing is a process and we should not despise small beginnings.

But you, dear friends, carefully build yourselves up in this most holy faith by praying in the Holy Spirit, staying right at the center of God's love, keeping your arms open and outstretched, ready for the mercy of our Master, Jesus Christ. This is the unending life, the real life! (Jude 1:20-21 MSG)

As long as we look to people, performance, possessions, or events to fill our loneliness, we will remain lonely. We need to welcome the loving presence of God deep in our souls. We need to get to know God so that we can trust Him. As we experience His love, we will know for sure that we are His children, and that we truly are “accepted in the beloved”.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What does loneliness look like in my life?
Isolation? Disconnection? Don't feel understood? Don't feel valued?
Abandoned? Unwanted?
2. How has loneliness impacted me in terms

- of: Relationships? Finances? Self-esteem?
3. When I am feeling lonely, do I look to God or others first?
 4. What would it mean for me to draw near to God when I feel lonely?
 5. Self-pity and loneliness are close companions. What positive truths do I need to remember and reaffirm when I feel worthless and lonely?
 6. Part of loneliness is the isolation from hiding behind walls of self-protection even when we are with people. Am I being real with others so authentic connections can be made between us?
 7. Am I hiding myself by staying busy doing things rather than being present to people?
 8. When I am feeling lonely, what new ways am I pursuing to help me find a sense of connection? What are others doing that I might try?
 9. How does becoming a part of a church or fellowship group enhance my experience of feeling connect with God and others?
 10. Reaching out to serve others and being present with them often brings others closer to us. How am I making myself available to God and others as a friend?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Thank you for your unfailing love for me. You have not left me without comfort. You have given me your Holy Spirit to be with me. When I feel lonely help me to remember that I am your child. When I feel disconnected from others help me to remember that you are with me and that

you never leave me nor forsake me. Please help me to befriend someone so that each of us may experience a healthy relationship built on the foundation of your word. Thank you that your mercy is new every morning and for being