

Three Tips for Walking Through Loneliness

Loneliness is a painful feeling of being alone, forsaken, and/or forgotten. Everyone has experienced times of feeling disconnected from others, and if this feeling intensifies, it can often be accompanied by thoughts of “no one cares” or “I’m all alone.” Loneliness occurs for many different reasons and is no “respector of persons.” It afflicts individuals in many differing circumstances, making it difficult to discern who is presently experiencing loneliness. Whether you are feeling relationally connected or disconnected, the following tips are meant to provide help for walking through the painful emotion of loneliness.

Tip #1: Recognize Loneliness

Because loneliness can occur for a variety of reasons, identifying factors which often bring the emotion of loneliness can be a very important step. When a problem is not correctly diagnosed, having an idea of what to do is much more difficult. When it comes to emotional pain, it is easy to believe the false messages this pain sends, leading us to blame others, self, or God. Emotional pain often moves us into unhelpful actions that further fuel painful emotions. Being able to correctly label the emotion, recognize if it is connected to something, and move into helpful action is a beneficial path. The following are common circumstances connected to the emotion of loneliness.

Some individuals experience loneliness due to being separated physically from other people (i.e., moving away from family and friends for a career or educational opportunity, etc.). In addition, physical separation through life transition or death brings the painful experience of loneliness.

Loneliness may also be experienced due to emotional hurt such as anxiety and depression. These hurts and many others often involve feelings of being distant or isolated. During these times, people often report feeling lonely even when surrounded by friends and family.

At times, feelings of loneliness result from the reality that there are not many (if any) individuals in a similar life position as you. For example, you may experience loneliness due to being the only unmarried person in your peer group or perhaps you feel significantly older or significantly younger or with significantly different values than others in your church community. Feelings of being “the only one” or “no one understands” can be painful and often lead to struggles with loneliness.

Being able to recognize and correctly label loneliness puts believers in a better position to identify God-honoring paths through loneliness. In addition, we should realize that loneliness tends to be cyclical rather than something you walk through and then never experience again. While this reality can be painful, it does frame up realistic expectations and helps us train our minds and behavior toward God when loneliness arises.

Tip #2: Inward Response to Loneliness

Even though loneliness is a common experience, when believers are in the midst of it, Satan works hard to make individuals feel as if no one could possibly understand what each of us is going through. He leads us to believe the lie that no one understands and that no one has faced the challenges we ourselves are facing. These painful messages can make us feel even more isolated. It is easy to get stuck in the cycle of feeling alone, pulling away from people, and then feeling even more alone.

Recognizing the messages loneliness sends can help us interact with these messages in a helpful way. Loneliness wants us to treat its messages as truth, and, when we do, these messages get louder and more painful. Loneliness can also push us toward unproductive thought patterns and arguments. The key word is unproductive. Speaking truth into an inaccurate message is very productive, while an endless cycle of feeling lonely, telling ourselves we shouldn’t feel lonely while we continue feeling lonely is a common, yet unproductive cycle.

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Instead, engage the difficult process of acknowledging the feeling of loneliness, speak truth into the loneliness, and then move into God-honoring action. This could be something simple such as texting a friend, going for a walk, reading a Psalm, or reaching out to someone to catch up.

Tip #3: Outward Response to Loneliness

Loneliness stems from feeling disconnected relationally. Therefore, the primary remedy is growing relational connections. Everyone needs relationships characterized by honesty, accountability, authenticity, and encouragement. It is wise to look at your circle of relationships and consider with whom you could pursue deeper connection. While no single relationship can fill the void that comes with loneliness, deep, long-lasting, loyal friendships can be a significant help.

Another action is to purposefully turn toward God. Purposefully acknowledging God's presence and actively believing he can support and encourage us in times of need. Just as Jesus often did during his life on earth, we need to take time to step away from responsibilities and distractions and commune with God through prayer and meditation. During this time with God, thank him for who he is, pour out your needs before him, sit quietly, and listen, allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us.

Remember loneliness is a common experience: you are not alone in feeling lonely. The inward and outward responses are meant to provide guidelines for what it might look like to faithfully walk through the difficulty of loneliness for yourself or helping others. God is near even when we don't feel that he is. *Hebrews 13:5b*: "...for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." This promise is 100% true – we are not alone, Christ is with us, and others do care.