

INTRODUCTION:

NO MORE LONELY DAYS

Life can feel lonely.

Who do you really *know* anymore? And who *really* knows you? In this high-tech post-pandemic world, isolation is beginning to feel normal (if not inevitable) and many people spend more time with screens than humans. What started as a novelty became a necessity and now it's wreaking havoc on our health—mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and even physically.

You and I have, perhaps unknowingly, become a part of the epidemic of loneliness. The US Surgeon General issued a general advisory in mid-2023 calling loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection a public health crisis in this country. The report states there is an epidemic of loneliness, raising the onset of dementia by 50 percent and premature death by 60 percent.¹ Not having a sense of community and close connection with others is now one of the unhealthiest habits you can have—as dangerous as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day! While aloneness is nothing new, the *new loneliness*—brought on by our increasing reliance on tech, combined with our post-COVID habits—is life-threatening.

An increase in abuse, addiction, anxiety, awareness of past wounds, and perceived failures has exacerbated the problem and made many of us feel even less sure of ourselves when it comes to developing authentic

and transparent relationships with others. Even being among other people can make us feel different, awkward, alone.

What is making *you* feel lonely today? Are you single and wishing you had a man—or more friends—in your life? Are you overwhelmed with work and responsibilities at home and feeling you no longer have a social life? Are you trying to juggle it all and feeling as though you are failing? Are you starting to sink in despair because of a lack of hope and direction? Maybe you feel disappointed that you don't have what others have. Perhaps you are feeling stressed, overwhelmed, burdened, or anxious, and at times, you feel that no one else understands.

Regardless of what is making you feel unsupported, anxious, or disappointed, you don't have to feel lonely any longer. The God who fashioned you in your mother's womb and assigned the exact place and time that you'd live is the same One who goes before you, walks alongside you, and always has your back. He's also the One who is *with* you, *for* you, and has a very specific reason for why you are here. He's the One who promises to never leave, and to always be enough when you feel you need more. He's the One who whispers to you, "Because of your trust in My Son, you are *more* than enough. And you will never walk alone."

I encourage you to come daily to this book over the next 50 days to drink from the well of His Word and bask in the knowledge of His delight in you. Keep your Bible beside you and look up the passages I'm writing about, and read them in context to glean even more. Pray the prayers aloud at the end of each devotion and make them your own. And accept the daily challenge as a way of applying and embracing what you've read. As you take a few minutes each day to focus on God's Word and His ways, you'll discover a closer connection with the Lover of your soul. And you just may discover the ways He is nudging you to break out of the lonely shell you're in and experience community with others He brings your way.

You have no idea how much He's been waiting to get up close and

personal with you, and convince you that you never truly walk alone. He's always, *always* there. And He's ready to pull you closer and show you what it means to commune with Him and others He has *already* brought into your life.

In Isaiah 30, God urged the Israelites to repent for forming an alliance with Egypt and looking everywhere else but to Him for their strength and provision. Through the prophet Isaiah's words, God expressed His patient, loving heart toward His people and confirmed to them that they would sense His presence and direction as long as they looked and listened for it. I believe these words can apply to us today as a tender reminder of His constant presence, refreshment, and direction if we listen for His voice:

The LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; How blessed are all those who long for Him...

He will certainly be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you...He... will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will see your Teacher. Your ears will hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right or to the left (verses 18-21).

Just as God whispered His direction and a reminder of His presence to His people in the Old Testament, He will be there for you too. Let's not miss it.

Yours for a closer connection with Jesus, the Lover of your soul,

Cindi

PART I

CONNECTING
WITH
GOD'S HEART



DAY 1

WELCOMING THE QUIET

*Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place
and get some rest.*

MARK 6:31 NIV

Do you ever feel uncomfortable in the quiet, especially when you're alone?

While we may long for quiet in the midst of the constant chatter of televisions or podcasts, or the chaos of work or arguing children, what do we do with stillness, when there's no one else in the room and we start to feel alone?

Perhaps when it's quiet, our thoughts become louder—thoughts we don't want running through our minds. Or maybe the stillness makes us feel that no one is there to support us or understand what we're dealing with.

You and I can view quiet alone times as reminders of our loneliness and do everything we can to avoid them. Or, we can welcome them as much-needed respites from the noise—as invitations from God, who has been whispering to us, “Come with Me to a quiet place and get some rest.”

When my husband left home for four days to climb another mountain with his friend, I realized the quiet times in the house afforded me something I had truly missed—the opportunity to spend more uninterrupted alone time with Jesus, the Lover of my soul. I relished being

Oh, to be *weaned* from my own life and become fully dependent on the One who calls to me in the quiet!

alone with Him and His Word on my back patio, alone with Him on a walking trail mid-day with no expectation from anyone of when I'd return. Alone with Him on the couch in the quiet of the evening, just me and my Lord.

Don't misunderstand. I *love* to be around people. I live for the lunch date or get-together with friends. And I enjoy having my husband home in the evenings when, for so many years, he was gone at work. But as I grow more in love with my Lord, I long for the alone times—more and more—to commune with Him. I long for the quiet to dwell on thoughts of Him and His loving thoughts toward me (Psalm 139:17).

How often we feel we must *set aside* time to be with God and then feel guilty for not doing it. How often our hearts may long for a getaway with Him, not realizing that getaway is available to us every moment of the day because He indwells us and calls us to come to Him within the recesses of our hearts.

“Be still, and *know* that I am God,” says Psalm 46:10 (NIV). We can get to know Him in the stillness as we allow Him to quiet our thoughts and we focus on His presence.

Psalm 46:10 in the New American Standard Bible reads, “*Stop striving* and know that I am God.” Having a heart at rest means we are not striving to control, not anxious nor stressed about what might happen or all that

we have to do. It means we are in a place of quiet contentment like David sang in Psalm 131:2: “I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me” (ESV).

Quiet. Full. Satisfied. Secure.

In another version, that verse reads: “I have quieted myself and caused my soul to become silent, that I might be as a child that is weaned of his mother, as one who is weaned from my own life” (JUB).

Oh, to be *weaned from my own life* and become fully dependent on the One who calls to me in the quiet!

Is it time to slow your pace, switch off the inner chatter, and ask God to still your mind from anxiety or busyness and flood it with His peace? Is it time to close the app, shut the lid on your device, or turn off the music or the TV, and develop a heart that not only welcomes but longs for the quiet stillness? It's there you will begin to discern your Savior's voice, which is much more loving than your own internal critic. It is there you will hear His tender words: “I have loved you with an everlasting love...I have drawn you out with kindness” (Jeremiah 31:3). It is there you will be assured of His promise to never leave you nor abandon you (Hebrews 13:5). It is there, in *His* presence, that you will find fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11).

Lord Jesus, I want to spend more focused time with You, the Lover of my soul. Help me to welcome the quiet times in my life and see them not as reminders of loneliness but as invitations to be alone with You. You are the One who pursues my heart. Calm my ambitions and my striving and help me to be like a child, content to lean against You in the quiet, and just rest.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Embrace the quiet of your day—or escape to it by carving it out somewhere—so you can get away with God in your heart. Close your eyes. Enjoy the stillness of the moment and the assurance of His presence. Spend some time thanking Him for breathing rest—and quiet—into your day.

DAY 2

IN HIS IMAGE

*God created man in His own image,
in the image of God He created him;
male and female He created them.*

GENESIS 1:27

*H*ave you noticed the trend? We often refer to ourselves—and our daily activities—in electronic terms as if we were devices. In our culture, as well as across the world, many people use *Google* as a verb and often feel more comfortable with their electronic devices than with one another. I can't help but think this makes us feel more alone than ever—like objects rather than people, and digital codes rather than designed creations.

We are often encouraged to *plug into* a church and to *unplug* from our busyness. After a conference or webinar, we want to *defrag* from information overload. When we're high on adrenaline, we consider ourselves *wired*; when we're burnt out, we say we've *run down the battery*. When we need to rest, we say we must *recharge*.

And our interpersonal relationships are now *internet* relationships. Face time used to mean what it sounds like, and it didn't involve a phone,

tablet, or laptop screen. *Social* used to mean *talking* or *being* with one another, not scrolling on a device.

“Can we Zoom about this later? I don’t have the bandwidth for it right now.”

You and I were made in the image of God, not in the likeness of a smartphone. Our sustainer is God Almighty, not Apple, Microsoft, Google, or Amazon!

So how do we reclaim (or just remind ourselves of) our human status as God’s creation, made in His image and for His glory? We can start by rethinking how we speak about and define ourselves.

Next time you are drained of power and need to recharge (your body *or* your phone), let your device run dry and keep it off for (gasp!) an hour or two. If you fall behind with what happened on social media, your notifications will likely let you know. And if you miss a call, someone can leave a message (all phones have voicemail, like those old-fashioned desktop answering machines back in the day when you—or your parents—had far more time and space in your day for creativity, meaningful conversations, and thoughtful execution of what you deemed your top priority).

God never told us in His Word to hurry up, produce more, or run down the battery. His words resonate at a different pace: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10 ESV); and “Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Yet our next-day or even “same-day delivery with Prime” has made us even more incapable of waiting on God who is not bound by time or delivery schedules. The words of the psalmists were not “Hurry up, God, I need an answer within the hour,” but rather, “I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning” (Psalm 130:6 NIV). Good things,

rich things, priceless things come to those who wait on God and His perfect timing.

Do you need to revisit some of the things humans, rather than devices, do so you can become a vintage believer who experiences the beauty of waiting on God?

One of my favorite *humanizing* activities is my daily walk around a small lake near my home. I can't help but recognize and adore God when I'm outside among the beauty of His creation—away from technology, mobile devices, and anything with a screen or signal. It is then that I can tune in to *His* signals—a gentle breeze, the way He parts the clouds and sends the sun's rays to shine through, the song of a bird, the rustle of leaves, and the reminder that “the earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1 esv). As you slow down and get outside and off your phone, you may rediscover the beauty of your Creator (not your Programmer) who calls you His masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10 NLT).

According to the Westminster Catechism, man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever. That means we were created to worship. (Do I dare say we are *wired* for it?) Being out in the beauty of His creation and worshipping Him reminds me of the Luke 19 account when Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem on a young colt and the Pharisees demanded He rebuke His followers for waving their palm branches and crying out praise to Him, their king. Jesus told the Pharisees if the people remained silent, “the very stones would cry out” (verse 40 esv).

He *must* be praised. And we are the ones *created* to do it.

Don't leave your God-given calling and purpose to the rocks! Get off your device, notice God and the people all around you, and give Him, not your phone, the attention He deserves.

Lord, what if zeal for Your Word, not the contents of my phone, were to consume me? Help my worship time to exceed my screen time so I am reminded of who I am in Your eyes.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Turn off your phone for half an hour (or leave it at home) and go outside to enjoy the presence of God and a break from tech. This may be what reinvigorates your soul so you can once again hear God's voice.

DAY 3

AS CLOSE AS YOUR BREATH

*The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

PSALM 34:18

Do you sometimes feel like God is far away? Heartbreak, struggles, hurts from the past, unanswered prayers, or filling your schedule with everything but Him can make you believe God is distant. But Scripture abounds with evidence that He is as close to you as the air you breathe.

Psalm 139 assures us that God knows every detail of our lives, and in verses 7-12, we read there's nowhere we can go to get outside of His presence and away from His watchful eye. Hebrews 13:5 also tells us He will never leave us nor forsake us. But maybe you know all that and you still long to know He's there.

When we feel like God is far away, it's often because we are the ones who have distanced ourselves. Perhaps other loves have stolen our heart. The feeling that He's distant can be an indicator that we need to

put ourselves in the position where we can sense His presence, hear His voice, notice His work around us, and invite Him closer to our hearts.

Tiffany, a young married professional, told me, “There have definitely been moments in my life when I felt God was far away, but looking back, I was hesitant to truly bring my struggles before Him. I know now that if I fully pour my heart out to Him, I will feel that He is with me in that moment.”

How can you be assured God is right next to you?

Take a Divine Pause—Sometimes we can’t sense God’s presence because there’s too much of everything else going on. Too much noise. Too much confusion. Too much anxiety. Too many apps or windows open. Too many voices and thoughts running through our minds. Center your mind on Him (Colossians 3:1-2) and start to breathe deeply. Try it. Exhale the distracting thoughts. Inhale a desire to sense His presence. Exhale your preoccupation with self. Inhale a desire to know Him more completely. Exhale the worries of the moment. Inhale His peace. Now, don’t you feel closer to His heart already? There’s a reason His Word says, “Be *still*, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10 *ESV*).

Whisper His Name—There are times we need God but we just don’t know what to say or where to begin. Start by saying His name and then speak your heart’s cry. Scripture says there is power in the name of Jesus, not only because “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12 *NIV*), but because Jesus responds to His name when His loved ones call to Him.

The writers of the classics called this type of whispering cry “breath prayers.” My breath prayers to sense His presence are “Jesus, I need You,” or “Jesus, give me a heart for You.” Calling upon His name is one of the simplest ways to sense His presence. And I believe the simplest of cries are the ones that penetrate His heart—and ours—the quickest.

Read His Word Aloud—God speaks to us through His Word. And one of the best ways to sense His presence is to get into His Word and ask His Holy Spirit to guide you into a better understanding of it. When you read God’s Word, and even speak it audibly, you will sense its power and His presence. The Bible says God’s Word is “living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). That sharp sword will prick your heart through conviction, inspiration, enlightenment, or determination. A pricked heart is better than a numb, dull, or complacent heart any day, so get into His Word and find Him there.

“If your heart is broken, you’ll find GOD right there; if you’re kicked in the gut, he’ll help you catch your breath.”

Start Praising Him—God inhabits the praises of His people. Ever wondered why you sometimes feel closer to God when you’re in a church service, singing hymns or praise songs? It’s possibly because that’s where worship tends to take place. But you don’t have to be in a church building among other believers in order to worship Him. Worship is praise and acknowledgment of His worthiness wherever you are and in whatever situation you are in. Worship is surrender. Worship is giving Him your time, talents, and treasure.

When you start praising God regardless of where you are, you’ll sense His presence, probably because you’re no longer focused on yourself, but on Him. When you open the door of your heart to love Him, He will meet you there. Every time. In fact, Psalm 34:18 in *The Message* assures us God is always just a breath away...or just as close as our own breath:

If your heart is broken, you’ll find GOD right there;
If you’re kicked in the gut, he’ll help you catch your breath.

Lord, thank You for never hiding from me. Your Word says I will find You when I search for You with all my heart (Jeremiah 29:13). Make Your presence known as close and real as the air I breathe.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

Practice spiritual breathing by exhaling (breathing out your doubts), and inhaling (breathing in an expectation of God's presence). Breathe out your insistence on your own way; breathe in your desire for God's control.