

## Loneliness v. Solitude

Whether it's due to this ever-changing pandemic or because of painful life events (or both), many people are struggling with being alone.

I'd like to point out from the beginning that the struggle is *real*.

However, it's important to realize that being alone and being lonely are actually different:

- **Solitude** is the “state or situation of being alone.”
- **Loneliness** is “sadness because one has no friends or company.” (dictionary.com)
- Solitude is a *situation*; loneliness is a *feeling* – and a hard feeling at that!

When I reflect upon and embrace the idea of solitude,  
I discover that I have IT ... it does not have ME.

But when I allow loneliness to show up in my life,  
it has ME ... I do not have IT.

Solitude feels like empowerment (dog wagging the tail).  
Loneliness feels like dis-empowerment (tail wagging the dog).

Both solitude and loneliness are imbued with personal meaning and messages.

Solitude says:

- I believe that I have value on a personal level as well as in the lives of others.
- It extends an invitation to embrace and acknowledge the present moment and what I have right now.
- Solitude is finite; there will be meaningful face-to-face connection and time spent with others in the future.
- Time spent in solitude can be enjoyed, full of possibilities and creativity.

Loneliness says:

- You'll never be able to escape being alone! Time spent in loneliness is like being pushed inside a room with no windows or doors.
- You must have a distraction, otherwise you could feel swallowed up by your emotions.
- You have no choices. Loneliness is in charge.
- Others do not want to spend time with you; there is no use in reaching out.
- Others will harm you; it is not safe to reach out.

The truth is, we do have a choice. Even if the condition of being alone doesn't change, our view of it can.

**Solitude** asks something of us – to recognize our worth and realize being alone doesn't last.

**Loneliness** removes things from us – it lies that we are not worthy of relationships, that relationships are unsafe, and that the future will not change.

If you're feeling swallowed up by loneliness, try this: Take a slow, deep breath (or a few), pause, and allow yourself to wonder what lies you are believing. Remember: just because you think it, doesn't make it true! Then notice the emotions that accompany the lies. What messages are they trying to convey? Try keeping a journal of your observations. Journaling is a very helpful way to clarify the lies and the emotions that follow.

Next, wonder this: how can I change the lies into something true? "I will always be alone" may change to "I'm currently alone, but I have been with others in the past and will be again in the future." Or "I feel terrible being alone" can change to "It's hard to be alone, but I can take a walk and notice the beauty of the blooming trees and green grass. I don't have to stay in this feeling."

It could be that you are physically alone right now, and yet you do not have to be lonely. Find creative and peace-filled ways to fill your time. Give yourself grace. Talk back to the lies. Reach out to others. We have been and are living in extraordinary times. It's going to take work to stabilize ourselves internally as the ground beneath continues to roll (for whatever reasons it's currently rolling). The work may need to be repeated many times a day. And that is okay.

If making these shifts feels like a Herculean challenge, recognize it may be the time for counseling. You do not have to do it by yourself. If you like, reach out to me to set up an appointment.

Peace,

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