

You May Be Alone, But You Don't Have To Be Lonely

As long shadows give way to the blackness of night, a hush stills the air. Her children have been tucked into bed, and the house lies deathly quiet. The silence is not a friend to her, as it beats out the rhythm of an all-too-familiar song: she is alone, and feels painfully lonely.

I have spoken to many single mothers who say that the worse time of day for them is the quiet evening time, when the children have gone to bed. Why? Because that is when we are most reminded of our singleness and tend to feel lonely. I have experienced many quiet moments like the one described above, and have attempted to drown them with harmful vices. Some bouts of loneliness have thrown me into deep pits of depression, that have taken months, even years to climb out of. The depression rendered me ineffective in the rearing of my children, unproductive for God and society, and incapable of helping others in need. But, I believe I finally have a way to shake myself out of these states. The answer for me became "**perspective**".

I figured that if I could change the way I view my aloneness and loneliness, I could change my attitude toward them, and thus change my behaviour. I'm not making light of this struggle. Once you get saved, the devil knows he cannot steal your salvation. But, he can steal your joy and render you unproductive for God. Oh, the struggle is a very real one. It is as real as getting victory over selfishness or pride. And like most battles, the answer is easier said than done.

I say the answer for me was "perspective" because I believe that as rational creatures, we need to have things make sense to us. When we can rationally digest something into our understanding, we can develop an attitude toward it, which then shapes our behaviour in regard to it. For example, Stephen was falsely accused in Acts chapter 7. If he had seen his battle as merely a physical one, he may have attempted to defend himself (isn't that what we do?). But, he knew it was a spiritual battle. So with the

face "*as of an angel*" he took this opportunity to witness to the members of the council. For his witnessing, Stephen was stoned in chapter 8. Had he seen this as merely a physical attack, he could have become angry with God for allowing it to happen (isn't that what we do?). Instead, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and "*saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God*". Stephen had the right perspective on what was happening to him. So often, we have a warped perspective, which leads to warped thinking and warped behaviours.

So how was my perspective changed? Well, I wasn't really aware of the steps I was taking, until I later looked back to see how it had happened. Don't get me wrong I have not attained perfection in this area; I still occasionally, feel lonely. But, loneliness does not have the same overwhelming grip on me that it used to have. I looked up the words "alone" and "lonely" in a dictionary and found that although we tend to use them interchangeably, they really refer to two different states. "Alone" means "apart from other persons or things; quite by oneself; solitary". "Lonely" means "feeling oneself alone and longing for company or friends; lonesome" (World Book Dictionary). I realised that being alone is a physical state; feeling lonely is an emotional reaction (often to being alone). **I may have to be alone, but I do not have to feel lonely.** Of course, we are not truly alone; Hebrews 13:5 tells us that Jesus said, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*". But for the purpose of this article, I speak of being without human company (which for us usually means being without a husband - to spend the quiet evening hours with).

Then God did a wonderful thing for me. I say that God did it, because I know that only God can turn things so completely around. The very quiet alone-time I used to despise, I now desire. I am not sure when it all took place, but I do know why; and looking back now, I also know how. I decided a long time ago that I would become useful for God. I did not want to reach the end of my life feeling that God wasted His time putting me here. My children became my first priority. I started making decisions that were beneficial to their spiritual welfare, regardless of my own physical desires. I didn't realise it then, but this was the first step in becoming responsible for my "kingdom

from God". As my ability to manage things improved, God gave me more to manage. I gained responsibilities in different areas of my life, but particularly at church. Then my struggle became how to manage them all well, or "**balance**" - the second word that has come to mean so much to me (but that' s a whole other article). Because of my need to manage things well, I began to need some quiet time away from my children to seek God' s wisdom for many situations. I began to need more quiet time alone to read my Bible and pray. I began to need quiet time to just sit and think; to sort out the events of one day and organise those of the next. I began to get up earlier and leave the children in bed longer; and stay up later after they had gone to bed. Today, my quiet alone-time is very precious to me, and I guard it.

I believe it all started with a strong desire to change my reactions to my feeling lonely. By deliberately setting out to change my perspective on "being alone", God was able to change my attitude toward it. I believe it was then that God was willing to change things so completely around for me. Having a husband to spend quiet moments with is still an appealing idea, but has dropped on my list of priorities.

Since then, my perspective on loneliness has changed yet again. When loneliness creeps up in me, it is as "selfishness and self-pity", an ugly snake that wraps around my heart and threatens to strangle the life out of it. I am determined not to let this happen. Loneliness is also a sign to me that I have let the responsibilities that God gave me slide above God on my list of priorities; that physical desires have become my main focus instead of spiritual ones. So, this once-dreaded emotion now serves a good purpose in my spiritual life. God is good. And everything that God does is good. He alone can make all things work together for good - even our bouts of loneliness.