



CHRONIC JOY® DEVOTIONAL

REFRAME IT! LONELINESS AND SOLITUDE

By Kara Plett

Did you know it took 44 years (1884-1928) to gather and define over 500,000 words for the first edition of the Oxford Dictionary? Words and their meanings are so fascinating.

Lately, I've been reflecting on two similar and distinct words – *loneliness* and *solitude*. What do these two words suggest to you? Does one have a more positive or a more negative connotation? Have you experienced either one – or both? Maybe, for you, there is little difference between them.

I have felt lonely, and there have been times when I have been saddened by the lack of people in my day. For me, loneliness is not a positive thing. When I feel lonely, I try to escape from it. I may pick up my phone and scroll...and scroll...and scroll. I may turn the TV on and flip through the stations. I will try anything to avoid feeling lonely.

What about solitude? If I view solitude the same way I see loneliness, it produces a negative emotion in me, but when I think about solitude in the context of God's Word, I know it can mean something much different. It is *intentional time* that I can spend alone with God.

Jesus craved times of solitude:

- *In these days, he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night, he continued in prayer to God.* (Luke 6:12)
- *And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray.* (Mark 6:46)
- *But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.* (Luke 5:16)

If Jesus needed times of solitude with His Father, how much more do I?

Having chronic illness can significantly impact our relationships and how much time we may spend alone. We can often feel lonely and become saddened by our situation. It may seem our times alone are forced upon us more than we would like.

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We need human connection (God made us this way.), so feeling lonely when we are alone is normal. However, could we also view these times as opportunities for solitude? Could they be new spaces for a special connection with God, not something we have to run from but a Father we can run to in these times?

Be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10) is beloved by many people, but applying this verse by finding space to be still in the busyness of our days can be very challenging. As I reflect on my loneliness, I wonder if those of us dealing with chronic pain and illness have been given a unique gift – a gift of time that allows solitude with God (if we choose) and that offers the opportunity to get to know Him more deeply. As we grow closer to Him, we learn to trust that He will give us what we need each day.

We know loneliness will come our way, so what if we plan for the next time the feeling overwhelms us? How can we settle into a simple time with God?

Maybe we can listen to worship music and let the words wash over us. It may be helpful to write God a letter expressing our feelings. I know He wants us to share our hearts with Him.

You could have a resource on hand that can help guide your time with Him – like Chronic Joy's The Collect. Print it out and have it ready to help you focus on God when your heart is heavy.

Maybe the next time we feel lonely, we can try to reframe it as a gift—a gift of solitude with our Savior.

PRAYER

Father, You understand every emotion we feel because You have felt them Yourself. You know we will experience loneliness. Help us see our times of solitude as a gift from You—as space to deepen our understanding of who You are and then trust You more fully in every situation. In Jesus' name, amen.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- When was the last time you felt lonely? How did you respond to your loneliness?
- What differences do you see between the words loneliness and solitude?
- Take some time to plan for how you could connect with God in solitude the next time you feel lonely.

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