



From Loneliness to Solitude

BY **ROB HARDIES**, SENIOR MINISTER, ALL SOULS CHURCH UNITARIAN, WASHINGTON, DC

One Sunday morning several years ago I stood on the front steps and greeted those who arrived. These front step greetings are one of my favorite rituals of Sunday morning—a chance for me to connect, if only briefly, with each and every person who walks through the doors. It allows me to take the temperature, if you will, of the congregation.

On the particular morning I'm thinking of, a woman ambled up the steps to the church. Her eyes were cast down, and a shadow hung over her face. This was a woman I'd seen Sunday after Sunday, but who had never interacted with me at any length. I didn't know her very well. We usually shook hands, but that morning she came up and gave me a big hug.

Now, as a minister, I give and receive lots of hugs. It's one of the perks of the job. And having given quite a lot of them, I have a sense for what the typical Sunday morning ministerial hug feels like. It's firm but gentle, and usually lasts only a moment or two. Sometimes, though, the hug is longer and more intense than usual, and that's when I know that there's something going on in a person's life. You can just tell from the hug. And at those times, a simple greeting becomes a moment of healing ministry.

Well, on that day this woman's hug was long and it was tight, and she wouldn't let go. So I held her. And when she was done she said to me with tears in her eyes that the greetings she received at church on Sunday mornings—the hugs and handshakes from minister and congregation—were the only human touch she received all week long. "Thank you," she said, and she walked into the sanctuary and took her seat.



Loneliness is a horrible thing. And it is far more pervasive than we can imagine, partly because when we are lonely we tend to think we're the only ones. But loneliness is not confined to those who live alone. It plagues married and partnered people, families with and without children, people with lots of friends, young people, the elderly, the middle-aged—loneliness runs the gamut. Indeed, therapists confirm that it is the most frequently cited reason that people seek professional counseling. Loneliness saps our vitality. It makes us feel scared and insecure and vulnerable. The isolation and disconnectedness that it fosters leave us feeling unloved—or worse, unlovable. Loneliness is an assault on our sense of our own worth and dignity—the worth and a dignity that are our birthright.

Being alone for any length of time inevitably brings us face to face with the void, with that series of questions and fears that we don't want to entertain. The fear that we are unloved. The fear that we are alone. The fear of that great loneliness called death. The suspicion that we secretly harbor but rarely utter, that there may be no real rhyme or reason to our life, no purpose or meaning to our being here. In short, loneliness can be terrifying.

And so, we do all we can to avoid it. Anything to bring us back from the brink of that abyss, that void. Just think of all the time we spend trying to convince ourselves we're *not* alone. Is it just me, or does anyone else feel like you spend the entire day checking to see who's contacted you? Checking your office voicemail. Checking your home voicemail. Checking your cell phone voicemail. Checking e-mail. Checking Facebook. Checking to see if the letter carrier arrived. And all the while quietly disappointed that we hear more from those who would sell us something, or demand something of us, than those who would love us.

Quest

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One can be instructed
in society;
one is inspired
only in solitude.

—Johann Wolfgang
von Goethe

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT SOLITUDE

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We run away from our loneliness, busying ourselves with work and errands and shopping, racing frantically, fighting traffic, running red lights and cutting corners. Until one day, says Langston Hughes, until one day, “You hurry around the corner and the person you bump into will be yourself. And then you’ll know there are no more

Solitude can lead to a rich communion with the soul, a conversation with the soul.

corners to turn.” You can’t run anymore. All our voicemails, all our frenzy, can’t save us from our loneliness. Eventually we must meet it face to face and confront what it is we find there.

Only when we stop fleeing our loneliness and allow ourselves to settle into it for a time, to rest in it, to tolerate the void, to ask the painful questions that need to be asked—only then can we begin to transform our loneliness into something richer.

I grew up as an only child. And I’ve come to believe that one of the gifts (one of the *many* gifts) of the only child is that she develops the ability, at an early age, to cope with loneliness. Only children often find themselves on their own, and as a child you don’t have the agency to flee your loneliness. So you learn to cope. You learn to make it your friend.

There was a great piece by Adam Gopnik in the *New Yorker* some while back in which he expressed concern about his 4-year-old daughter’s psychological development. You see, his daughter—also an only child—had created an imaginary friend, the sort of childhood playmate who shares our toys and dutifully takes our orders. But this little girl’s imaginary friend was always too busy to play with her.

So, for instance, the little girl would flip open her imaginary cell phone and, imitating her parents clipped

New York speech, would bark into the phone, “Meet me at Starbucks in 25 minutes.” Nervously, the girl’s parents watched to see if this time the friend would make good on the play date. After a long pause, the mother gingerly asked, “What did your friend say, sweetie?” Unperturbed, the girl replied, “He already had an appointment.”

My point is that children are resilient in their ability to cope with being alone. They make their loneliness a companion (even if an overscheduled one). And though our adult loneliness is different from a child’s, I think we have to learn to do the same. To find in our loneliness a companion. The novelist Ann Packer says, “Lonely is a funny thing. It’s almost like another person. After a while, it’ll keep you company if you’ll let it.”

If we spend enough time with our loneliness we will discover that the silent companion of whom Packer speaks is, of course, ourselves—the part of ourselves that lies beneath the busyness of our daily lives, and beyond the initial fear of loneliness and meaninglessness.

That place beneath and beyond is a place called solitude. And it is different from loneliness. May Sarton writes that “loneliness is the poverty of the self [and] solitude is the richness of the self.” The self is poor because we are interdependent beings and therefore, alone, we are incomplete, insufficient, vulnerable. The self is rich, because within us lies the soul: a limitless world waiting to be discovered.

The difference between loneliness and solitude in our inner lives is very similar to the difference between how we use the words *naked* and *nude* to describe our physical bodies. Naked describes the human body stripped and vulnerable. Naked refers to what the body lacks, clothing. Nude, on the other hand, refers to the bare body as a thing of beauty, a work of art, a sculpture. Similarly, loneliness describes all

that is lost when we are alone; solitude describes all that is gained.

In her book, *Journal of a Solitude*, May Sarton calls the time that she spends alone (with only herself and her thoughts) her “real life.” Because for her, all the socializing and loving that she did in the world wasn’t real unless there was an opportunity to stand back and reflect on it in silence—to discover who she was, what she cared about, and what she believed, so that she could then bring that fuller, richer self back into relationship with the world.

Solitude can lead to a rich communion with the soul, a conversation with the soul. Beyond our fear and loneliness there is a calm companionship, a peace. We are at home in our own thoughts, feelings and bodies. Here, we aren’t afraid.

In solitude we do as Sarton sought to do in her journal, “break through to the rough, rocky, depths of life, to the matrix itself.” This is a religious task. The conversation that we have with our souls in this solitude is the fountainhead of the spiritual life, from which all else flows. In *Religion in the Making*, the great religious philosopher Alfred North Whitehead says: “Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness.”

In fact, the spiritual journey requires that we do two things with respect to our solitariness: It requires that we cultivate a solitude that will allow us to discover the richness of the self; and it requires that we create community so that we might alleviate the poverty of the self.

Friends, my prayer is that we might build a community where the loneliness in each of us reaches out to the loneliness of the other, so that we might offer one another communion. And, further, that we might build a community where the solitude in each of us reaches out to the solitude of the other, so that we might offer one another a glimpse of the holy. ■

Power of One

BY AMY ZUCKER MORGENSTERN,
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Our culture sends very mixed messages about solitude, being single, and marriage.

We believe strongly that each person must be able to stand alone. In my packet of suggested wedding readings I have the famous passage from Rilke's letters, in which he says, "Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other." A selection from Kahlil Gibran counseling partners to allow spaces in their togetherness is another popular choice. So is a blessing that reminds the couple how marriage should not so much fill their emptiness as help them to know their fullness. Too much dependence on one another, even a marriage partner—especially a marriage partner—is seen as codependence: a disorder, a failure to be as independent as each soul ought to be.

Rilke himself valued solitude so highly that after his wedding he frequently retreated for long periods of almost monastic seclusion, and he and his wife essentially lived as a separated couple for most of the rest of their lives. "I belong to solitude," he wrote. "I must not need anyone...all my strength is born from this detachment." Solitude offers an opportunity to practice a kind of integrity of self.

Most of us, however, aren't so delighted when singleness offers us this golden gift. And no wonder. It isn't easy to be single in this culture—especially around Valentine's Day—but all around the year as well. There are so many social pressures to do things as a couple; there are still people who look askance at anyone who dines alone or goes to the movies alone. You're likely to get a look of pity, or, if you profess a

desire to do these things alone, disbelief. Our children hear a lot of stories teaching that marriage is the key to happiness, and very few that suggest that someone can be just as happy single. We dismiss the companionship of friends, parents, children and housemates as a poor substitute. As for actually living alone? Surely no one would prefer that for more than a short time!

When I knew that I would be addressing this subject, I wrote to a friend in her late thirties who has been single for a long time, and unhappily so. She has often spoken about how things are frequently organized for couples; how, when people get married, they start to socialize with other married couples instead of with the singles who have been their friends. So I asked her whether she had any resources to suggest, perhaps a book that summed up her thoughts on being single in this culture. What she offered instead was this thought: "Maybe you should ask somebody who is happy being single."

That really gave me pause. I wondered whether I knew anyone who was single and *wanted* to be single. Many single people I know are happier than people in unhappy marriages, certainly, and seem as happy as those in happy marriages. And yet most of them, I reflected, seem to want a partner. Or was this just my own assumption, my successful brainwashing by the pro-marriage propaganda that we see all around us?

Being single has its advantages. Even the long-and happily-partnered may sometimes wish for the simplicity of making a major life decision without consulting anyone else's needs, or for the freedom of staying out late without calling home, or choosing activities without negotiation and compromise over the slightest thing like what movie you're going to see. To have a shared life is, in the words of the writer Lynn Darling, "to be blended, smoothed, to pare down the sharp ends of [one's]

personality to fit into the too-small allowances made for them." It isn't easy, and it is at odds with the fundamentally individualistic ethos urged on us by this culture.

But to be voluntarily single, as my friend suggested some might be? To happily embrace that state as the best one for you? We seldom see this phenomenon, or appreciate it when we do. We are more likely to call it sour grapes, or, if we grudgingly acknowledge that the person is genu-

Our culture sends very mixed messages about solitude, being single, and marriage.

inely content, we still imagine that, really, the poor, lonely single will gratefully abandon that state of being when the right person comes along. We shake our heads at priests and monks who chose a life without partners, and are suspicious of those who claim to be happy being single.

You can tell a lot about a culture by what it deems worthy of a ritual. We have rituals for engagement, marriage, and childbearing, and for the loss of a partner through death, but when it comes to divorce, that conscious choice to become single, we have to invent them. As for the choice by a single person to *remain* single, we have no rituals to mark that momentous decision at all. It is as if we don't recognize that it can *be* a conscious and willing choice—perhaps not a permanent one, but still a deliberate choice.

We do have subtle ways of signifying an intent to remain single, if not forever, then for the foreseeable future. Buying a house by oneself, or, especially, choosing to raise a child alone are ways of saying, "I am not going to suspend my life until that day when I may have a partner." I have heard of a couple who financially helped each of their

married daughters set up a home and, when another daughter told them she did not anticipate ever marrying, they gave her the same gift of money and household goods that they would have if she had had a wedding. It was a lovely way to demonstrate that they respected her choice. But the truth is, we generally regard singlehood as a way of life to be pitied and not accepted. If this weren't the case, we would have more established ways to recognize and honor it.

And yet there is something amply available to singles that, for most of us, is vitally important to a rich inner life; something that is correspondingly rare inside partnered life—solitude. Every religious tradition I know puts a premium on solitude. Every tradition, whether it encourages marriage for all or has a celibate class such as nuns or priests, advocates some kind of serious time alone—for example, in meditation or prayer. Time alone, time in retreat, is important on a regular basis.

Even when one is in a temple full of people chanting or singing hymns in harmony, meditation and prayer are oddly solitary activities. The Jewish service, which consists largely of group chants, has a silent prayer at its center, when each person stands and, as it were, faces God all alone, as, in that tradition, every soul must one day face God after death. Even in the midst of community we are each in some sense alone, and that aloneness deserves a spot at the center of worship.

Perhaps it was the same conviction that inspired the Muslim mystic Hafiz to write a paean to loneliness:

*Don't surrender your loneliness
So quickly.
Let it cut more deep.
Let it ferment and season you
As few human
Or even divine ingredients can.*

The great non-God-centered religion, Buddhism, values solitude perhaps most of all. And so the Buddha, in his last words to his disciples, urged

them, “Be a light unto yourselves....Look not for refuge to anyone besides yourselves.”

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In our own tradition, where we affirm that spiritual truth is to be found in human experience, being alone is as essential to spirituality as being in community. If we surround ourselves always with faces and voices, we remain in hiding from ourselves, and it is in encounter with ourselves that so much insight comes. We need to meditate, read, think, walk the labyrinth, sit in the silent hall before anyone else comes in—find solitude to balance interaction.

In her song “Solitude Standing,” Suzanne Vega imagines Solitude as a person.

*Solitude stands in the doorway
I'm struck once again by her
black silhouette
By her long cool stare and her
silence
I suddenly remember each time
we've met
And she turns to me with her
hand extended
Her palm is split with a flower
with a flame*

Solitude's gift: a flower and a flame. Solitude can burn and it can offer beauty. In fact, it often does both at once. I do not mean to be glib about being alone, which can be as excruciating. Yet if we always flee from its pain, if we pick up the phone too quickly, defer our loneliness with shallow and unsatisfying relationships, we deny ourselves solitude's treasures.

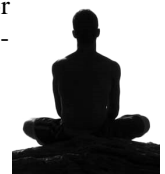
To live alone is not necessarily to face down loneliness, but it can be an opportunity to learn to face it down—or better, to learn to go with its ebbs and

flows and not fear it. Those who spend all of their adulthood in one long-term partnership or a series in quick succession, never having to spend much time in the deep end, may not go beyond treading water or floating on our backs, waiting to be saved. It takes some sustained solitude for most of us, in Rilke's words, to “ripen, to become something in [ourselves], to become world, to become world in [ourselves].” Singleness provides a milieu for this practice, just as monastic life provides solitude in which the soul may encounter the divine.

Those of us who are single may need to fight off the demon loneliness in order to ripen. Those of us who are partnered may need to be sure that we have not been picked too soon, that we don't breathe a sigh of relief at not having to be alone with ourselves, and end up sitting unripened on the comfortable shelf. Just as it is possible to be lonely within marriage, it is possible to find a wholesome space of solitude within that cocoon.

Which brings us back to Rilke. He writes of love, and it is true that it is difficult to love well when one lives in constant fear of abandonment, when one's love becomes a life preserver to which one must cling or drown. Desperation is not a strong foundation for any relationship. But it is not only love that requires an apprenticeship of solitude. Responsibility, self knowledge, joy, openness to the new, courage to face the unknown—all the various and beautiful forms of wisdom and happiness are harvests that come most bountifully to those who have learned to be alone with themselves.

We may go eagerly looking for solitude, or she may come to our doorway unbidden and unwanted. But all of us, whether we are happily or unhappily partnered, willingly or unwillingly single, have much to learn from welcoming solitude into our lives. ■



Finding Strength in Silence

BY **PATRICE CURTIS**,
MINISTER OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



Mother Teresa said: "To keep a lamp burning, we have to keep putting oil in it."

I first started doing volunteer work in college. I volunteered with Beyond War, a non-profit that highlights the dangers of nuclear war. I volunteered with Results, a non-profit that uses the power of letter-writing to effect policy change on hunger in developing countries and the United States. I volunteered with the National Organization for Women, a non-profit that promotes the equality of women and men.

My first career was centered around humanitarian emergencies, those that occurred because of armed conflict. My last position doing that work was a year in Bosnia right after the end of that civil war. I listened to many, many women and men provide intimate details of the impact of that war on them and their families.

I let my lamp dim so much that I could no longer see my way toward continuing that work or my volunteer work. I had what is sometimes called compassion fatigue. It took five years before I returned to volunteer work.

What I know now, that I did not know several years ago, is that renewal starts from a quiet space. Silence can be a hard commodity to find in our busy lives: either real silence, where you don't hear anything but the rushing wind, or virtual silence, in which you quiet the noise within. But it is critical that we find that silence, for, as the writer Henri Nouwen reminds us, out of solitude comes the renewing energy that will let us feed the hungry, clothe the naked, witness suffering, challenge institutions, demand justice.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King writes about seeking solitude before making the final decision to go forward with a march in which he would submit to being arrested. Here was the situation: many people submitted to non-violent arrest as part of the civil rights movement. They would then be bailed out by a bondsman, with the Southern Christian Leadership Council providing funds for the process. As Rev. King describes it:

Late Thursday night, the bondsman who had been furnishing bail...notified us he would be unable to continue. The city [Birmingham] had notified him that his financial assets were insufficient. Obviously, this was another move on the part of the city to hurt our cause. Good Friday morning I sat with 24 key people. As we talked, a sense of doom began to pervade the room. Finally, someone spoke up...

"Martin, this means you can't go to jail. We need a lot of money. We need it now. You are the only one who has the contacts to get it. If you go to jail, we are lost.

He was referring to the 300 already in jail, and the belief that no one else would consent to being arrested if they didn't know how long they would be jailed. The big march scheduled for Sunday, Easter Sunday, would have to be called off. Rev. King continues:

I sat there in the midst of the deepest quiet I have ever felt, with two dozen others in the room. There comes a time in the atmosphere of leadership when a man surrounded by loyal friends and allies realizes he has come face to face with himself. I was alone in that crowded room. I walked to another room in the back of the hotel suite and stood in the center of the floor. I think I was standing also at the center of all that my life had brought me to be.

Rev. King found a quiet place, a place of solitude, so that the divine could speak within him, so that he could

listen deeply. Giving ourselves time for solitude lets our hearts bloom through accepting our whole selves: the broken parts, the healed parts, the places full of joy. We transform our woundedness exactly when we embrace it and offer ourselves compassion, and offer ourselves in compassionate service to those in need. ■

The CLF Invites GA Delegates

Would you like to represent the Church of the Larger Fellowship at General Assembly (GA) this summer? The CLF is entitled to 22 delegates at the UUA's General Assembly in Providence, Rhode Island, from June 25-29, 2014. You will also be able to attend workshops, concerts, programs, and worship services galore, while meeting Unitarian Universalists from near and far. And as a delegate you will be able to vote during plenary sessions. You can also meet our minister, the Rev. Meg Riley, and members of the CLF Board and staff. Delegates are responsible for their own expenses for GA.

Our delegates are asked to attend and usher at the CLF Worship Service and to work a minimum of three hours in the CLF booth. We also ask that you write a short report of your experience at General Assembly. CLF delegates vote their conscience in plenary sessions.

If you'd like to participate in GA 2014 in this role, call CLF Executive Director Lorraine Dennis at **617-948-6166** or e-mail ldennis@clfu.org to indicate your interest. Visit the UUA's General Assembly website at www.uua.org/ga for details. ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
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I've recently been engaged in a fascinating email conversation with a man named Michael Lorence, who found me electronically and reached out. Michael and his wife Diana wanted to share their story of the seven years that they spent living in a 12x12 foot house in the center of 60 acres of woods. They called the cabin, "Innermost House."

Michael explained that they went to town once a month for groceries, and otherwise depended on someone with a car to drop fresh produce at their home weekly. He said that he and Diana might sometimes go weeks without speaking to each other. They had no electricity, and heated and cooked with a simple fireplace. They had books, and people dropped in for conversations every couple of weeks, but they lived a life of deep solitude. Kind of as if Henry Thoreau had gone to Walden Pond with a spouse and didn't pop over to the Emersons' place every day for lunch. (I have only been in contact with Michael, but he is clear that it is primarily Diana's vision driving what they have done, and casts himself in the role of supportive spouse.)

After Michael wrote, I went to their website (www.innermosthouse.com) and stared at the pictures of the beautiful house he designed, and watched a video about their life there (www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDbrUk2xYBo). The love and joy that emanates from both of them, in writing and in video, is palpable.

I tried to imagine what such a life would mean, but quickly realized that imagining such a thing has little to do with living it. The closest thing I have

to compare it to is the way I have felt on the extended Vipassana Buddhist silent meditation retreats that I have enjoyed. The longest I have spent in such structured silence is 10 days, and I will say that at the end, I also looked shiny and clear, sort of like Diana does in the Innermost House video.

The gift of those days, and of Innermost House, is the presence that comes from simplicity. I simply have too many tasks, relationships, belongings, and thoughts to tend to all of them well. Solitude often comes with simplicity, particularly an inner simplicity.

In all honesty, I spent the vast majority of time during those ten-day retreats becoming aware of how rarely I am completely present to myself. It was not one blissful moment after another. And I have not been on an extended retreat since I got my smartphone. The mere idea of being without that little buddy for ten days is enough to raise serious anxiety in my chest. When I looked at the gorgeous cabin in the woods, my first thought was: *Would there be smartphone coverage there?*

This habit, this urge, reminds me yet again why I take a digital sabbath every week. Michael and Diana Lorence may have spent seven years in a tiny remote cabin, but for me, simply turning off all electronic devices for a day each week is a huge stretch. And yet, I will say, this choice to silence my electronics has become pivotal in my life. It's one thing to be gardening and to know that any moment I might be "pinged" by phone or text or email. It's quite another when my phone is inside, turned off.

A digital sabbath allows those of us who are generally plugged in to focus fully on what we are doing. It's like having a conversation with the door closed instead of knowing that at any moment someone might walk by, eavesdrop, or chime in as we talk in the grocery store checkout line.

I asked Michael about the conversations that took place when visitors arrived at Innermost House. He said they were powerful because of what the visitors were "allowed to leave behind." He said, "First they left their working lives behind to drive to the farm. Then they left their commuting life behind with their car. Then they left their worldly life behind with the woods. Then they left their daylight selves behind with the darkness. At last they left the rest of themselves behind to squeeze through the door."

What do you need to leave behind in order to enjoy solitude? Whether it's the monkey-mind that wants to engage you on a zafu cushion, the lure of the pings from an electronic device, the car or the job or the commute—what do you have to set aside?

And, where will you be most able to enjoy that solitude? For me, it's not a remote tiny house but the garden that surrounds my city home. The companionship I feel with my deeper self in the presence of my little green friends is the prize that makes it worth letting go of the comfort of distraction or human company.

Solitude, easiness in our own solitary presence, is the greatest gift we can give ourselves, and one that no one else can give. ■



REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



The other day my internet went out. Eventually a guy from the cable company came out and determined that our cable had worn through from rubbing against a tree, and that really all of the cable from the main line to the modem needed to be replaced. So it took a day before the repair guy came out, and a good chunk of time for him to get everything fixed. I might note that our internet cable not only provides my connection with the world of the internet (the world where the CLF primarily lives), it is also the source of my home phone service and the combination of Netflix and TV station websites that we use for watching TV. That same day a cell tower near my house was badly damaged, and I had no useable service on my cell phone, either.

My wife was gone for the weekend, my daughter at school or dance or her friend's house where they have all the necessities of modern life. Like internet and cable. Now, I'm not someone who generally has problems with being alone. I like working from home, hanging out with only our pets for company. Except that I forget how rarely I truly am by myself. I meet with other members of the CLF staff in video conferences and we stay in touch through a regular stream of Facebook messages and emails. I follow the details of my friends' lives, from life-threatening illness to what they had for lunch, on Facebook. While trolling the web I read political reflections from people I will never meet, and I share the lives of TV characters who don't even exist. I might be the only person in the house, but I am far from alone.

I admit that I was more than a little bit grumpy about being cut off from all of my connections, unable to even call my wife to see how her trip was going. I felt isolated, and more than a

little bored. But you know what? It didn't kill me. The world managed to keep turning without my stuffing every little bit of it

that I could in through my eyeballs at every possible second. And more than that, the very intensity of my grumpiness reminded me just how addicted I can become to constant hits off of other people's lives: the chance to learn from or argue with or simply "like" what other people have to share—or to find affirmation from the fact that someone else is learning or arguing with or liking what I have to say.

simply be with yourself. You could make a pilgrimage to a monastery, or commit yourself to silent meditation at a Buddhist retreat. Or you could just set your phone on the table and go for a walk, listening for the sounds of birds and what your heart might have to say. You could lie on the floor and breathe deeply, stretching your muscles in unfamiliar ways. You could turn off every electronic item in the house other than your refrigerator and look out the window, letting your body become in tune with the brightness of the day or the depth of the night. You could let your imagination wander out that window, following your thoughts wherever they might



You could let your imagination wander out that window, following your thoughts wherever they might take you, exploring worlds that exist only for you.

In our modern world it's easy to never truly be alone, with only our own thoughts for company. My daughter even takes her phone with her into the bathroom. It's become incredibly simple to be in touch with anyone, any time. And I love that. I love coming to our CLF online worship and chatting with folks in Norway and Canada and Ghana and Germany and Denmark and all across the US. I love reading personal updates from my favorite authors and my friends from high school.

But I also know that there are some things that only happen when I'm alone. Really alone. Alone with the space that leaves room for my own deepest voice to speak. Alone with the silence that gives me room to sing. Alone with the discomfort that pushes me to address what is off-kilter in my life, and alone with the simple pleasure of watching the sun come through the window at the start of the day.

Maybe you, like me, could use a little time away from the addiction to constant connection. A little time to

take you, exploring worlds that exist only for you. You could curl up in your favorite blanket and rest, allowing your body to feel whatever it feels.

You wouldn't have to spend all day, let alone commit yourself to the life of a hermit. But for a little while, maybe even every day, you could pretend that all the wires that connect you to the stream of information from outside have been cut, and all there is—all there *really* is—is you. ■





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I have a friend who is a sailor.
Sometimes he takes companions
with him, but frequently he sails
alone. He has time to think while
he is out there in his boat on the
water, and among the things he has
thought about is the difference be-
tween solitude and loneliness.
Solitude, he says, is when you are
out on your boat and the wind fills
the sails. Loneliness is when the
wind dies. It is as good a descrip-
tion as I have ever heard. ■

by **Earl K. Holt III**, minister
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