

The Lord's My Shepherd

The Lord's my Shepherd—I'll not want; He makes me down to lie
In pastures green—He leadeth me the quiet waters by.

My soul He doth restore again, and me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness e'en for His own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk thru death's dark vale, yet will I fear no ill,
For Thou art with me, and Thy rod and staff me comfort still.

My table Thou hast furnished in presence of my foes;
My head Thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me,
And in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be..

—From the Scottish Psalter, 1650
William Whittingham and others.
Public domain



Dear Readers



As I read through this issue and the articles included by real people going through real pain, my heart was so touched.

Reading what you have experienced in your loneliness and aloneness after the death of your spouse—I learned things I had never considered before. Things that will help me as I walk alongside friends, relatives and acquaintances who are widowed.

Your words brought to my mind the words of Jesus in John 16:32 when He tells His disciples that they will all scatter and leave Him—alone. But then He says: *Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.* Let your being alone draw you to Jesus and His peace.

I grasp onto this peace as I walk through life now with Jesus as my Savior. He promises me that *neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate me from His love for me, His care for me, His very presence with me* (Romans 8:38-39).

At death someone leaves us. On August 31 my grandson was stillborn and left us before we even got to know sweet little Owen Nathaniel. We grieve but not as those who have no hope. A familiar song says, “My Hope is in the LORD!” Seek God through Jesus Christ for HOPE... not hope in people or things or circumstances, but HOPE in the One and Only Son that God sent to our world. May Jesus bring HOPE to your life. Let His HOPE drive out the loneliness and aloneness that you feel. Open your Bible to the book of John and let God’s love for you fill those lonely times.

—Miriam Lofquist, *Editor*

Never Alone

After a week of vacationing in the Denver area, my sister drove me to the airport. Saying goodbye, she walked into the distance. I was unprepared for the feelings of aloneness that swept over me. Waiting for my flight, I watched the crowds of people greeting and hugging each other. I would be flying home alone for the first time as a widow, without my husband to embrace me at the other end. I fought back tears, wanting to yell out, “I’m all alone!” Immediately I thought of God saying, “I love you. I’m here. You are never alone.”

We all have times when we feel absolutely alone. Jesus felt the ultimate aloneness when His Father left Him as He died on the cross for our sins. In His humanness, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”

As children of God, we might feel alone, but we aren’t. God promises He will be behind and before us (Psalm 139:5), and that His kindness never leaves us. Psalm 73:23 says, “Yet I am always with you; You hold me by my right hand.” Sometimes we panic and feel forsaken but He is there! I know He was holding my hand in that airport. The presence of the Lord is very strong. Next time you feel alone, call on Him. His loving-kindness never leaves us.

—Joan Hopson, *reprinted from CF December 1996, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 5.*



Alone But Not Lonely



My friends who are widowed, some for over ten years, tell me they often feel lonely. This issue addresses that problem. I have never lived by myself or had to make all my decisions alone, so I have gathered articles from men and women

who know what it means to have that kind of frustration and isolation. They not only write about practical ways to deal with loneliness, they also tell how to make it your friend by letting it train you to reach out to others and to increase your awareness of God. Andrae Crouch wrote the song, “Through It All” and said “those precious lonely hours” are when Jesus let him know that “I was His own.” Let this issue help you learn that too.

—Marcia Hornok, *Managing Editor*

SINGLE AGAIN SURVIVAL GUIDE

People should have in their homes an Emergency Preparedness Kit for disasters. Among other things, it should contain (1) water and dehydrated food, (2) medical supplies, (3) portable radio, and (4) flashlights and batteries. If we could make a spiritual survival kit for being widowed, it would contain practices analogous to those four things.

1. Seek The Bread of Life and Living Water

Although great loss can cause us to question God and be angry, don't get bitter or give up on Him! You will find that His Word can nourish your soul and quench its thirst. Ways to overcome resentment toward God include quoting Scriptures when you feel anxious, listening to music that praises God, nurturing friendships with other Christians, and listing your blessings. If you want to end the doldrums, set a timer for one hour and write down everything you are thankful for. When the timer goes off, you'll want to keep writing!

2. Use Mentor Medicine

Grief is a solitary process, but it helps to be able to talk with someone who has experienced a similar loss. Such empathy and support can bandage your wounded heart. What if you don't know anyone else in your situation? Reading materials like CF, grief groups, and counselors can mentor you and provide resources to ease your pain.

3. Connect with the World

Resist the urge to withdraw. No matter how uncomfortable it may feel, don't turn down invitations, and even create some of your own. Being with people takes our mind off ourselves. Recently a widow in our church had a birthday. Not wanting to be alone that evening, she invited two couples to her home for dinner and asked them to bring side dishes. Everyone had a delightful time. Church is the best place to find community, but classes, library programs, and volunteering also create opportunities for relationships to form and grow.

Your family will probably be a good support network for you since they have lost the same person you have. Now is the time to extend forgiveness if necessary and give up any grudges you may be holding.

4. Shine Your Light to Others

While God keeps us in this world, we are to be a light shining God's truth to those in our circle of influence. Ask Him where to begin and what to do, and then look for open doors. Additionally, as long as we can think, we can pray for others' needs. Investing in people is one of the best ways to avoid self pity and loneliness. You don't have to be adequate—just willing. Like a battery to a flashlight, the Holy Spirit will empower you to serve God by serving others.

When we seek God, find a mentor, stay connected, and minister to others, we have a spiritual emergency kit to help us survive loneliness.



A ‘Wonderful’ Life

“I’ve never known love like this before”* is a line from a song sung at our wedding. And it was true. But since my husband’s death, I have never known loneliness like this before. I know you understand.

Sometimes when I’m around people I don’t feel as lonely. But other times I feel lonelier than. With time (three years now), I’m not as lonely when I am alone.

When my husband was alive we had “date nights” so that I could be reminded that I am more than a mother. (The role of mother can be all consuming and it is possible to lose oneself in the process.) Now I try to have “date nights” with Jesus so that I can remember that I am the daughter of the King.

The hole caused by my husband’s death is gradually heal-

ing. It used to be gigantic, filling the center of my being, and all that was left was a shell around the gaping wound. God is healing it from the outside and it is gradually getting smaller. If God covered it up quickly, all kinds of infection would be trapped inside. We must be patient with the work God is doing in our life. Job refers to what God did as “wonderful” (Job 42:3) and He is doing something wonderful in your life as well.

—Barbara Leitch, *Barbara adds: Wonderful is the Hebrew word Pālā, which means “to be separate, to be distinguished, to be singular, to be extraordinary, and to be hard.”* (from *Lexical Aids to the Old Testament in the Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*).

**I’ve Never Known Love*” by Klaus Gregory Long and Pam Thum

Fighting Loneliness

The very reason God brought man and woman together into marriage was for companionship (Genesis 2:18). When death breaks this union, an inevitable void forms. Loneliness is one of the extended by-products of grief. Like a low-grade headache, loneliness continues to afflict long after the other emotional components of grief have passed.

A lonely widow can often be an angry widow. This anger is different from the kind she experiences during the grieving process (e.g., becoming angry at her husband because he did not take care of his health, which resulted in his death.) Lonely anger is characterized by endless dissatisfaction and antagonism. A widow who has fallen into this trap alienates herself from those friends and relatives who could be a comfort to her. Loneliness is magnified when widows drive close friends and relatives away because of anger.

Loneliness can also lead to isolation by falling into the rut of withdrawing from church gatherings, social events, and intimate friendships. One of the first steps in recovering from loneliness is to face this emotion directly. Feeling the pain of

loneliness will drive widows/ers to seek the cure. The cure consists of a few techniques that will require time to work.

Volunteer work, continued education, or employment are a few activities that can increase one’s self-worth as well as contribute to society. Developing new roles and relationships is another solution. Some people give themselves to a cause that is not only rewarding but also eases their loneliness. Most cities have abundant opportunities for volunteer work through which widows/ers can combat loneliness.

Loneliness can actually be positive when a widow/er is driven to seek companionship with the Lord. The spiritual values resulting from loneliness make the pain bearable. After they have been alone for some time, people often testify that they pray more, read the Bible more, trust more, and enjoy the fellowship of other believers more.

—Wesley M. Teterud, *excerpted with permission from his book, Caring for Widows: You and Your Church Can Make a Difference, from Chapter 4 “Coping With Emotional Pain.”*



What to Do With Loneliness

Be still and know that He is God. When you are lonely, too much stillness is exactly the thing that seems to be laying waste your soul. Use the stillness to quiet your heart before God. Get to know Him. If He is God, He is still in charge.

Remember that you are not alone. Jesus promised His disciples, “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20). Never mind if you cannot feel His presence. He is there, never for one moment forgetting you.

Give thanks. In times of my greatest loneliness, I have been lifted up by the promise of 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, “for this slight moment is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the

things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.” This is something to thank God for. This loneliness itself, which seems a weight, will be far outweighed by glory.

Refuse self-pity. Refuse it absolutely. It is a deadly thing with power to destroy you. Turn your thoughts to Christ who has already carried your griefs and sorrows [Isaiah 53:4]. Accept your loneliness. It is one stage, and only one stage, on a journey that brings you to God. It will not last.

Offer up your loneliness to God, as the little boy offered to Jesus his five loaves and two fish. God can transform it for the good of others.

Do something for someone else. No matter who or where you are, there is something you can do, somebody who needs you. Pray that you may be an instrument of God’s peace, that where there is loneliness you may bring joy.

The important thing is to receive this moment’s experience with both hands. Don’t waste it. “Wherever you are, be all there,” Jim once wrote. “Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God.”

—Elisabeth Elliot, *used with her permission from Faith That Does Not Falter*, p. 32-33. *Her recent book, Finding Your Way Through Loneliness*, is published by Revell.

FIRST ANNIVERSARY ALONE

Today I thought I’ll stay in bed,
Pull up the blanket and cover my head.
I could see no reason for me to rise;
There was no sun, just clouds in the skies.
I felt this day could not go well.
What could happen to break this spell?

As I lay there tears began to fall.
This is God’s world after all.
It was His plan, should I question why
He took away my special guy
Somehow I felt Virg whisper low,
“I was tired; I had to go.”

Today I started down a new road,
Trusting God to bear my load.
I know the way will hold more sorrow,
But God has promised a bright tomorrow.
So for today, I’ll look to Him
To dry my tears when life seems dim.

“This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24).

—ShirLee Taylor, *September 30, 2009*

Unfulfilled Longings & Psalm 37:4

“Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” God puts desires in our heart, but that doesn’t mean He will fulfill them. We must submit them back to Him. He wants us to put our hope in Him not in what we want from Him. He owes us nothing. He has already blessed us abundantly—how dare I say, “If only He would do one more thing, then I could be happy,” or “If He gives me....I’ll trust Him from then on.” What we get from God is never an entitlement—always a gift, always undeserved.

—Leah Hornok

FROM GOD'S WORD

That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope (Romans 15:4).

Dr. Roy B. Zuck tells us *How to Find Comfort in Chaos* from Psalm 23.

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- 1 - The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
 - 2 - He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.
 - 3 - He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
 - 4 - Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
 - 5 - You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over.
 - 6 - Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
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Psalm 23 is probably the best known, best loved, and most comforting of all the psalms John McNeill, a Scottish preacher many years ago, said he was so familiar with this psalm and he loved it so much that he sometimes felt as if he wrote it himself. D. L. Moody called this a psalm of prepositions. "With me" is the Lord; "beneath me" are green pastures; "beside me" are still waters; "before me" is a table; "around me" are enemies; "after me" are goodness and mercy; and "ahead of me" is living in the Lord's house forever.

The psalm begins with the well-known affirmation, "The Lord is my shepherd." From the New Testament we know that Jesus is the "good shepherd" (John 10:11, 14), the "great shepherd" (Hebrews 13:20), and the "chief shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4). Shepherds know their sheep, care for them, guide them, feed them, protect them, comfort them, and discipline them. As our shepherd the Lord does all these things for us. Think of it! The God who created the vast universe is our own shepherd!

Since Jesus is our shepherd, that means we are sheep! And that's not a very complimentary metaphor. Sheep cannot guide themselves (they are near-sighted), cleanse themselves, or even defend themselves. So we, like sheep, must depend on the Lord.

Of interest is David's statement that "The Lord is MY shepherd." Only those who know Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin can make that affirmation. How wonderful to have a personal relationship with the sovereign Lord. This word "my" is one of many personal pronouns in the psalm: me, my, I, you, your, He, His. Sometime read the psalm again and count the

many occurrences of these words in six short verses.

Then David added, "I shall not want" (KJV), or "I shall lack nothing" (NIV). One person paraphrased this, "I don't need a thing." How could anyone say that? Because the Lord is enough for all of our spiritual needs. David wrote in Psalm 34:10, "Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing." Yes, the Lord is enough even when we are in pain, lonely, confused, or are facing the unknown.

Verses 2 and 3 use the words "he" and "me" so many times that someone has called this "The He-Me Psalm." How good to know that the Lord, like a shepherd, makes us, like sheep, to lie down in green pastures. This implies that they are nourished, because sheep will not lie down if they are hungry. Life is full of hazards and uncertainties, but with the Lord we can rest in Him.

The "still waters" in verse 2 are literally "waters of rest," that is, peaceful water. Sheep will not lie down by turbulent streams. So the shepherd leads them to quiet water. Jesus too gives us peace even when the circumstances are distressful.

Sheep tend to stray from the flock. "We all, like sheep, have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6). So they need to be brought back, to be restored. Verse 3 states, "He guides me in paths of righteousness," that is, upright paths. Shepherds know which paths are best for their sheep, though the paths may not always seem the best to the sheep. And the guidance is personal: "He guides me."

Sometimes shepherds have to take their sheep through valleys, deep ravines where animals and snakes are waiting to attack and kill. These are valleys where shadows are scary and even suggest the possibility of death. Our tendency in such valleys is to be afraid. But

David wrote, "I will fear no evil," that is, "harm." How could he have such assurance? Answer: "For You are with me." Just as sheep are comforted by knowing their shepherd is with them, so we too can take comfort in the fact that no matter how dark the circumstances, the Lord is with us. Thankfully He doesn't take us into the valley and leave us; He takes us *through* the valley.

The rod mentioned in verse 4 was a club, something like a short baseball bat. Shepherds used the rod to ward off wild animals. The staff, with a curved end, was used to pull sheep from a precipice or out of a thorn bush, or to prompt a sheep back into the fold. Sheep can delight in knowing that their shepherd will protect and rescue them. We too can be grateful that the Lord rescues us and takes care of us.

When a shepherd "prepares a table" for his sheep (v. 5), he pulls up poisonous weeds and cleanses out debris. This is done "in the presence of my enemies," while lions, bears, wolves, and snakes are waiting to have lamb chops for supper. We too have enemies—Satan, the world, self, discouragement. And yet God nourishes us by His Word even while we are surrounded by these adversaries.

Anointing a sheep's head (v. 5) speaks of the shepherd applying olive oil to soothe bruises and thorn-

infested wool. The Lord soothes our hurts too.

When sheep are thirsty, the shepherd gives them a drink, sometimes from a hollowed-out stone from which the water overflows. And when we are thirsty in a spiritual way, the Lord refreshes us by His Word.

The psalm concludes in verse 6 with a note of confidence introduced by the word "surely." Sheep dogs often follow a flock of sheep, so David spoke of goodness and love—like sheep dogs—following him to bless him. And this provision, David wrote, will be "all the days of my life." Whether sunshine or shadow, peace or peril, or rest or rush, God always blesses us with His goodness and love.

David ends this short but profound psalm with the assurance, "and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Every believer can enjoy that same note of assurance that they will be with the Lord forever in heaven.

Psalm 23 begins and ends with the Lord. In Him we have serenity and security, peace and provisions, rest and refreshment, guidance and goodness, communion and consolation. If you are facing an unresolved problem, or going through a deep valley of shadows, or are in need of provisions and guidance, then follow your Shepherd!

—Dr. Roy B. Zuck

1. Which of the prepositional phrases in Dr. Zuck's first paragraph mean the most to you and why?

2. You may have never owned sheep, but if you've had a beloved indoor pet, list all the ways you took care of it (similar to a shepherd's job). _____

3. Now think of yourself as a near-sighted, dependent, vulnerable sheep—what do you need from your shepherd? _____

4. Circle all the personal pronouns in Psalm 23 as Dr. Zuck suggests.

5. Is the Lord enough for the emotional pain you feel?

Circle YES or NO

Is the Lord enough when you feel lonely?

Circle YES or NO

Is the Lord enough when you are confused?

Circle YES or NO

Is the Lord enough so you can face your unknown future?
Circle YES or NO

6. How has your Shepherd made you lie down in peace and rest quietly? _____

7. What harmful things do you fear? List them. Then for each one say aloud: "I will not fear _____ because You are with me."

8. How has God nourished you from His Word when you were emotionally hungry or spiritually thirsty? Write the verse or phrase here. _____

9. If God's goodness and love follow you like sheep dogs each day, record how His goodness and love have shown up in the past 24 hours for you. _____

10 – Read the psalm again, but this time read it aloud to God. Substitute "You, Your" for the words "He, His."



Loneliness, the Unwelcome Guest

On a hot August afternoon, with no warning, I was instantly and unceremoniously initiated into the club known as Widowhood. No one asked if I wanted to join or explained what would happen once I became a member. The clubhouse door opened and I was thrown in. No explanation. No instructions. No encouragement.

Before that time I had felt a great deal of sympathy toward women who had lost their spouses, but I never understood how every area of my life would change without my husband LeRoy.

One area that can be extremely hard to face is loneliness. It can descend on your heart like an unwelcome guest—greeting you the minute you open your eyes in the morning, spending the entire day at your side, sneaking into bed with you at night. But one thing I try to keep in mind is that being alone was not my choice but how I respond to it is. So what can one do with this unwanted guest of loneliness?

First, I would suggest connecting with another widow or widower. No one knows better what you are going through. One widow said that a close friend who was also a widow had gotten her through the very rough days and months after her husband's death. "I was invited out with a group of friends that my husband and I always went with and I found myself as a single in a room of couples. I felt alone and uncomfortable. But my friend Sue knew the evening would be difficult for me. I

could not have been home more than ten minutes when the phone rang. It was Sue."

"I just knew you needed to talk," the voice on the phone said. Do you have a Sue in your life? Call her.

Secondly, do not be afraid to seek Christian counseling to help you cope with being alone. A time may come when you feel loneliness threatening to throw you overboard and hold you under. If you feel overwhelmed and weighed down and unable to focus on daily activities, Christian counseling can play a large part in helping you manage the unwanted visitor by leading you to The Counselor, who will be our Refuge and "Strong Tower against the foe" when you feel faint (Psalm 61:1-4 NIV).

Lastly, may I suggest that you surround each day with the words of Jesus as He offers hope and peace to those of us in the Widowhood Club. Jesus Himself was familiar with loneliness [as Hebrews 4:15 states]. He understands. He cares. He offers rest and refuge. David wrote in many psalms that his only answer for everything he faced was found in God. (See Psalm 62:1, Psalm 91:1-2.) David begs in Psalm 25:16 (NIV) "Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted," and then shows God's answer by saying, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18 NIV).

I encourage you who are hurting today and who are experiencing the loneliness of loss to hold on tightly to friends who have traveled on this journey before you. Seek Christian counseling if you need support and encouragement. Most of all, wrap God's Word around you to find victory over the unwelcome guest of loneliness.

—Nancy E. Hughes. *For Nancy's helpful writings, type "The Grace Place widow's blog" into your Internet search box. You'll like what you find!*

I start every day thanking God for His goodness to me and talk to Him throughout the day. When I really miss Bob, I write him a letter. They will never be read by anyone, but they help me feel better.

—Ruth Gray



Odd Isn't Even

The bane of widowhood: being a single strand in a world of twine. When my rope unraveled, the only good I could see, was the sure promise of God's extra protection in Deuteronomy 10:18: "He defends the cause of the widow"—my comfort now in an alien world after the unwelcome ending to my marriage of four decades.

A year after my husband died, I attended my high school reunion. Alone. I can do this. After all, I don't expect to ever remarry. Get used to it, Sandi.

I entered a large room where the reunion was being held. Several dozen white-clad tables were set with fine china. Judging from the aroma in the background, they would soon be laden with rich food and savory coffee. And, I noted, with couples.

Okay, it's been forty-five years since high school. Do I recognize anyone? Oh, there's Darlene and Kathy with their spouses. I'll buddy-up to them.

Once we were seated at a table for ten, we introduced ourselves to the others in our circle and figured out who was who. Okay, that's done. Now I can relax.

Or not.

The head of the reunion committee announced that she would ring a bell at intervals during the meal so we could change tables and mingle with everyone.

My back muscles stiffened. I have to reveal I'm a "woman alone" not just once, but six times? Watch the silent pity on more faces? Endure the questions? Nope. Not going to happen. When the bell rang the first time, I stayed put at my safe table. The others all moved and were replaced by more unrecognized friends from my youth.

God, where are you--?

I watched these couples as they bent to their own rhythms, so natural they seemed unaware: a husband pulling out the chair for his wife, a wife finishing her husband's sentences, the unspoken glances in a secret code known only to them. I had that too. Once upon a time.

And then the familiar questions directed to me, "How did your husband pass away?"

"He died after four months of paralysis from three brainstem tumors." A table gone silent; all eating suspended.

"I'm so sorry. What are you doing these days?"

"Umm...I just don't know yet."

My former classmate looked down and then over to his wife, "Oh look, honey, here's your favorite crescent rolls."

By the ding of the final bell, I'd had it. With the arrival of the last group of couples, I leaned across the table, prepared to say, "Hi, I'm the Widow Elzinga. I'm hating this, so don't ask..." when I heard, "Sandi?"

I looked over and met sad eyes. "Marge, is that you? How are you?"

"Well..." she looked down, "my husband died awhile back."

"Mine too." Our eyes locked. I grabbed her hand and pulled her over to the side of the room. "We've got to talk."

My heart rate slowed to normal as God's comfort settled deep in my spirit.

—Sandi Elzinga, *Sandi is the author of GriefWalk: Hope Through The Dark Places, a blog for those who have lost a loved one. <http://sandielzinga.wordpress.com>.*

Dr. David Jeremiah's recent book,
Overcoming Loneliness, may be helpful for you.

His website has a study guide for the book
and audio CDs of his sermons on the topic.

www.davidjeremiah.org



Don't Be Home Alone

One of the toughest tasks after losing a spouse is adjusting to the silence, to the place at the table or the living room or the bed that is now empty. In the months following the loss of my husband to a heart attack, I learned that no matter how self-reliant and independent I feel, I do better when I need to answer to others and when I live in consideration of others. We were made to live in community. "It's not good for man to be alone," said our Creator, who is both Himself relational, and who made us relational creatures.

While it is common in other countries, where I often visit, to see three or four generations in the same house or in small rooms around a common courtyard, such living arrangements are unusual in the United States.

When we first talked about the kids coming to live with me, it was too soon after my husband's funeral and I needed time to grieve and to sort out who I was in this reinvented life. I needed time to discover what elements I wanted to keep and which to discard. Leaning on Jesus and learning how I wanted to live made me feel stronger and more self-assured.

I began taking mission trips and needed someone to watch my pets, water plants, and keep an eye on the house. My son Bill and his wife Gretchen lived in the next town and were kind about helping me out. They had a three-year-old son, Lucian, who is the delight of my life. So when Gretchen discovered she was pregnant, we came back to the notion of sharing a home.

Moving in with me cut a big rent payment from their budget, allowing Gretchen to stay at home with Lucian

and Lily. I don't have to hire someone to do lawn care, fix broken appliances, take out the garbage, or watch the house. I have the fun of waking up to grandson Lucian's kiss and of singing lullabies to Lily.

An unexpected bonus was getting to know my daughter-in-law. We have worked together to build trust and intimacy while sharing the kitchen or the front porch swing. And I get to see my son much more than I previously did.

It is important to talk about how to handle the need for privacy. They have their own rooms and bath on one wing of the house, as well as their own TV, play area, and parking places. They can invite friends over for dinner anytime. I remind myself not to offer suggestions unless I am asked, and they remember not to presume that I am free to babysit.

Working out the budget together and having short family meetings to discuss the schedule for the week helps to communicate expectations. This is an open-ended experiment. If at any time we don't find it working, we can try to fix it or go our separate ways again.

In a multi-generational household your relationship is more like peer-to-peer than parent-to-child. That takes maturity and clear communication. A big reason for my wanting this arrangement is so I can take Lucian to Sunday School and church with me and share Bible stories and songs with another generation. What a privilege!

—Phyllis Hammerstrom

www.ifca.org

IFCA International's website has much helpful information for you, such as recommended reading, starting a fellowship group, and encouragement for a new widow or widower.

Go to www.ifca.org and click on Ministries, then: widows/widowers.

- To order gift subscriptions of CF - www.ifca.org/cfsubscribe
- To donate (tax deductible) to this ministry - www.ifca.org/donations
- To see back issues of CF - www.ifca.org/cfarchive



The Gift of Loneliness

Everyone experiences loneliness at some time. It's a common denominator in the equation of life, but our natural response is to run from it or deny it by filling our lives with distractions. God has a better way. When we sink into loneliness and allow it to do its redemptive work by embracing it, it can be a powerful teacher. Luke 5:16 says, "Jesus withdrew into lonely places and prayed." In the same way that His lonely places benefitted Him, the loneliness we feel can promote positive changes in our life.

Loneliness can enlarge our hearts to love. Several years ago, my grandfather was diagnosed with leukemia. During the weeks before his death, he hugged tighter, smiled wider, and laughed more. Saying goodbye to those he cared for enlarged his heart to love—his greatest sorrow produced a greater virtue.

In the same way, the sorrow of loneliness can be fruitful by causing us to ache for human connection. Without it, we would never marry, engage in friendships or endure the numerous problems that are a natural part of intimacy. Think back to when you've felt most lonely. My bet is that you longed for a connection with someone familiar and reflected on their best virtues with gratitude. In short, loneliness enlarged your heart to love.

Loneliness can open us to a deeper knowledge of God's love when we get alone with Him. There are times when I'm lonely that I fight my need to spend quiet time with Christ. Why? Because facing loneliness can feel threatening, like squaring off with a bully who presses me into a corner and makes me look at things about myself that I don't want to see. However, I've learned that when I embrace my loneliness and hold the hand of God, I don't fall into a pit of despair like I feared. Rather, I find His comfort and healing for my broken places.

What do we miss when we run from loneliness and refuse to invite God into it? Ironically, the pain we try to avoid can create an even greater inner chaos. We need time alone with God when we are lonely. For example, a friend of mine always has a packed social calendar. When he's not working, he's helping someone with a chore, watching a movie, or engaging in any number of social activities. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with his interests. However,

there is something wrong with using busyness to hide from personal pain and loneliness. God calls us to live balanced lives in which we are neither afraid of solitude nor of being with others.

Loneliness can help me define or redefine my calling. Prior to becoming a writer, I was an elementary school teacher in Houston, Texas, where my days were spent tying shoes, painting, coloring and pasting. I spent my evenings primarily alone because my family and closest friends lived several states away. It was the three loneliest years of my life.

I wouldn't want to repeat my Texas experience, but I also wouldn't give it back. Loneliness caused me to question my purpose and ask myself if the things I was pouring my life into agreed with God's will. I found a new calling through my isolation. I put pen to paper and spent many hours journaling, resulting in a book I am writing. I learned that when God strips away our close connections for a season, It can be His way of moving us into a new purpose for our lives.

If you are lonely today, I hope you are encouraged. Remember that God can use your emotional pain to complete you. He has not forgotten you. The next time you are standing in a crowd or sitting in your house feeling lonely, press into your loneliness and find God's gift through it.

—Shana Schutte, *freelance writer, author, and speaker.*
*This article first appeared on family.org. See her website at www.runtogodministries.org, and find information about her new book, *Betrayed by God? Making Sense of Your Expectations.**

*God's hand that holds the ocean's depths
Can hold my small affairs;
His hand that guides the universe
Can carry all my cares.*

—Anonymous



A White Stone

Our Lord’s message to the church at Pergamum has a curious reference to “a new name” written on “a white stone” (Revelation 2:17). What could this mean?

There are two plausible explanations. In an ancient court of law, when defendants were condemned, they received a black stone with their name on it. If they were acquitted, they received a white stone. Similarly, those who have trusted Jesus Christ for salvation will receive an acquittal from the judgment of God. What a relief it is to know that our sins are forgiven!

Another explanation comes from the ancient Olympic games. When athletes won, they were awarded a white stone, which was a token of honor.

Together, these illustrations show us the wonderful balance of the Christian life. We are saved by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Yet obedient Christians often struggle as they seek to serve the One who saved them.

One explanation of the white stone is a picture of unearned acquittal. The other shows that we will be rewarded for acts of good works (1 Corinthians 3:13-14).

Trusting Christ for salvation gives us a new identity. It’s like receiving a new name written on a white stone, which shows that we are forgiven—completely.

Dennis De Haan wrote, “We’re saved by grace through faith alone; good works can have no part / But God rewards each loving deed that’s done with all our heart.”

Jesus removes our sin and rewards our service.

—Dennis Fisher, *copied with permission from Our Daily Bread, 90-Day Sample Edition, all rights reserved.*

Ed. Often people are confused when the Bible speaks of God rewarding us for our good works. The above article shows that such verses address people who are already Christians, urging them to live a life that pleases God. See Titus 3:8. Acts of service done as a Christian do not get us into heaven but do get rewarded in heaven. Other verses tell people how to go to heaven and state that none of our good works will make that possible. Jesus did all the work for us when He died and rose again. See Titus 3:5.

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Carol Gregory Founder
Miriam Lofquist. Editor
Marcia Hornok Managing Editor
Nila Rae Phelps Editor Emeritus
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Chera Fellowship – IFCA International
PO Box 810
Grandville, MI 49468
Call (616) 531-1840
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