**4. ISOLATION**

*Everyone needs solitude, especially a person who is used to thinking about what she experiences. Solitude is very important in my work as a mode of inspiration, but isolation is not good in this respect. I am not writing poetry about isolation.*

 *- Wisawa Szymborska*

*(A Polish poet who received a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1996)*

A common stereotype of artists is that we are isolated and misunderstood. But there is a significant difference between healthy solitude (reflection) and isolation. Loneliness comes from a lack of relationship and community.

Often we isolate ourselves when our real need is to be known in relationships. There are many reasons why we feel lonely; fatigue, failed relationships, guilt or shame, feeling overworked, independence, fear of man (fearing what others think of us), comparison, rejection, etc. The desire to wall ourselves off indicates that we need to pay more attention to our real issues.

With this isolation comes the danger of missing out on the thing we need the most which is love. We will not find the lasting fulfillment our souls require from a cheeseburger, a Facebook® update, or even our own craft. What we are talking about here is a healthy spiritual balance of solitude and community. This can be a difficult balance to learn in the city, because it requires boundaries and the ability to say, “Yes” and “No” at the appropriate times. As a follower of Christ you are called to be a light in darkness. You can’t grow spiritually in total isolation from other believers.

**THINK:** Are there specific times when you run from people and relationships? When? Why?

Are there specific times when you feel more alone?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Describe the subtle difference(s) between solitude and isolation?

2. What does the Bible have to say about isolation? Is isolation appropriate for a believer?

3. When Jesus retreated to the mountainside to pray alone, what was the purpose of this? Look up Luke 6:12 and Matthew 14:22-23.

**ENGAGING WITH OTHERS:**

*Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.* Philippians 2:4

*Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.* Romans 12:9-10

Seek out others and ask them about their experiences with loneliness. Actively listen to them by asking thoughtful questions and resisting the urge to share your perspective or opinion. Ask clarifying questions when they pause or stop – but don’t interrupt while they are sharing. Sincerely thank them for sharing with you. If it is appropriate or they are interested offer to tell your story as it relates to your understanding of isolation.

**PRAYER:**

*“Oh Lord, you have searched me and you know me, You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.”* -Psalm 139.

Ask God to reveal what is really going on in your heart. Take time to listen and write down what He is showing you.

**REFLECTION:**

What thoughts or emotions surface when you are feeling lonely for extended periods of time?Where are the quiet places where you can reflect on God’s love for you?

**OPTIONAL SUPPLEMENTAL READING:**

Hebrews 10:24-25