**Lonely - Or Empty?**

 Vanessa (not her real name) had never been without a boyfriend since she was thirteen years old. By all counts, the score was two bf’s in junior high, three in high school (roughly one per year), and a serious three-year relationship in college—followed by a quick rebound relationship in senior year. After college, Vanessa’s trend continued. She dated pretty regularly and by 25, was engaged. However, that didn’t last—Vanessa broke it off—and continued exploring relationships. By 28, Vanessa was married, by 32 she was divorced, and by 35 married again. The one common denominator in all of her break-ups over that 22-year stretch was Vanessa: She was the one who always initiated the break-ups. And why?

   Vanessa was empty inside.

   Unfortunately, Vanessa represents thousands of people in our culture who travel from relationship to relationship looking for someone to fill a void inside of them. Often people believe that if they can just find “the one”, they would finally feel “complete”. And that rarely ends well.

   How many times have we heard that premise—the idea that if we can just find that “soul mate”, that “other half”, then we’ll finally feel complete? Remember Tom Cruise’s famous line to Renee Zellweger in *Bridget Jones’ Diary* where he stares across the room at her and declares “You complete me!” The problem is that that’s a fallacy—the myth that any person can fill that void inside of us and give us that “happily ever after” that Bridget and her Prince Charming presumably enjoyed. Bridget and the Prince are fiction.

   Does that sound like the rantings of some bitter and jaded skeptic? Of course it does, but it’s not. The truth is that, yes, Virginia, true love does exist and brings great fulfillment and joy. But here’s what a relationship cannot do: fill the God-shaped void inside of us. The fact is, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, there’s a huge difference between emptiness and loneliness.

***Loneliness results from a separation from people, and emptiness results from a separation from God.***

   Feeling empty actually means that we’re lonely for God.

   In Genesis 2, God said of Adam, *“‘It’s not good that man [ad-am] should be alone…’” (vs. 18)*. Adam had, at that point, enjoyed the most intimate relationship with God possible for a human to experience; in the pre-Fall, there were no barriers between God and man. Adam had a spirit-to-spirit relationship with God the Father. Still, Adam was lonely; he desired human companionship—someone to love, both emotionally and physically; someone to share ministry with (ruling over creation); and someone with whom to imagine the future and explore destiny. Adam ached for an “Eve” but he wasn’t *empty*; he was full of his God and therefore complete. How do we know? Because Adam wasn’t experiencing any of the symptoms of emptiness: an identity crisis—he knew who he was: a son of God. Adam wasn’t questioning what was “wrong” with him because he didn’t have a girlfriend—he was simply wondering when and where he might find one. And Adam wasn’t at a standstill waiting for life to start until he got a wife; he was enjoying his relationship with God and moving in his destiny. Adam wasn’t “lost”, insecure or depressed. He was just lonely. He simply wanted what all of the animals seemed to have—someone to *compliment* him.

   Loneliness is not a bad thing. Lots of times it’s not fun but that emotion exists for a reason: to remind us that we need other human beings, that we’re part of the family of God, and that we can’t go it alone because we’re not equipped to do that. Loneliness nudges us to create family, community and to engage in interactions, relationships and commitments with other people. Imagine what the world would be like if we didn’t feel the need to participate with others. I can only surmise that far fewer people would populate the earth. In fact, I believe (don’t know for certain because I haven’t asked) that God created the feeling of loneliness so that humans would be motivated to “be fruitful and multiply.” If God hadn’t allowed loneliness, I can only imagine the conversation in Eden:

   GOD: “Adam, would you like a wife?”

   ADAM: “What’s a wife?”

   GOD: “You know, a mate, kind of like the elephants have, only more like you.”

   ADAM (thinks for a moment): “No, thank you. I’m happy with the elephants.”

   How do you know whether you’re empty or lonely? Clue number one: If you don’t have a relationship with God, that part of you that was created specifically for that purpose is going to be empty and you’re going to feel the pain of that. For example, if you have family and friends and/or a spouse and they’re good people and they love you—and yet you still feel “incomplete”, that’s emptiness, not loneliness. Or if there is a relationship with God but you find yourself “too busy” to spend any time with him, emptiness will happen.

   Clue number two: A very telling symptom of emptiness is a feeling that you just don’t *belong*. You might feel separated and depressed and, in some cases, as if something is wrong with you. This is probably one of the most painful feelings in the world. And it’s dangerous; who knows how many people have turned to drugs, alcohol and/or depression meds because of the pain of it? The good news is that nothing is wrong with you. You just miss God.

    The even better good news is that there’s a cure for both emptiness and loneliness. If you’re feeling empty, get with Jesus. It’s that simple. Allow his love and peace and security to surround you like a blanket. Breathe it in and let it get deep down inside of you. If you’ve never experienced that feeling, that’s nothing that can’t be fixed—all you have to do is to ask God for it and he’ll give it to you. God says, *“‘I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me’” (Proverbs 8:17)*. On the other hand, if you’re lonely, get with people. My mother used to say, “If you want friends, be a friend.” Good advice. Invite someone over for dinner or call someone to see how they’re doing or join a club or go to a Bible study. It’s not hard.

   Being empty and/or lonely are common feelings. Just remember that if you’re lonely for God, no human relationship on earth can ever fix that. Fill up on the presence of God and then you’ll be ready to give and to receive the love of other people.

   Then you’ll be complete.

Cindi Noble

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