



Alone is a word that stands by itself, carrying the austere, solitary beauty of its own meaning even as it is spoken to another. It is a word that can be felt both as an invitation to depth and as an imminent threat, as in ‘all alone’, with its returned echo of abandonment. ‘Alone’ is a word that rings with a strange finality, especially when contained in that haunting aggregate, ‘left all alone’, as if the state once experienced begins to define and engender its own inescapable world. The first step in spending time alone is to admit how afraid of it we are.

Being alone is a difficult discipline: a beautiful and difficult sense of being solitary is always the ground from which we step into a contemplative intimacy with the unknown, but the first portal of aloneness is often experienced as a gateway to alienation, grief, and abandonment. To find ourselves alone or to be left alone is a deep, fearful, and abiding human potentiality of which we are often unconsciously, deeply afraid.

One of the elemental dynamics of self-compassion is to understand the deep reluctance we have to be left to ourselves.

David Whyte
‘Alone,’ Consolations



Alone

Stuart Segall

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. —Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV)

What does ‘created for good works’ mean? For the Christian, this is something we want to dial into, be aware of, and grow in!

We are deliberately designed in our heart and mind with skill and a purpose, by God, for his purposes. For all of us, we know salvation is a gift and grace from above, and yet we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works.” I emphasize that good works do not give us salvation, but they are meant to be the result of salvation.

What is just one of the many good works we can do as Christians and followers of our Lord Jesus? One special work is the comforting and consolation of those who are alone, those who suffered loss and are trying to recover from that.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4). The Lord will wrap His arms of love and comfort around those who trust in Him.

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” (Psalm 147:3).

Grieving a significant loss takes time. Depending on the circumstances, it will be necessary for those in supportive roles and those grieving to be gentle with themselves, as the process can take weeks to years.

Grieving helps a person

gradually adjust to a new chapter of life. Full awareness of a significant loss can happen suddenly or over a few days or weeks. When we introduce this subject, it is important to understand this one important starting point to grieve—“everyone is unique.”

The grieving process does not happen in a step-by-step, orderly fashion. Grieving tends to be unpredictable, with dark, hopeless thoughts and feelings coming and going like a see-saw trying to find a balancing act.

Now, there are some stepping stones in the grief process. It is important to note that mourning that brings healing doesn’t bypass any part of the journey or process.

Several years ago, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss-American psychiatrist, described grief in stages. Grief however does not always occur in easily definable stages, but it is good just to look at the pathway stones that come up when we grieve.

1. Denial, numbness, and shock. Many will assume this first stage is not beneficial when in reality it may play an important part. This stage protects the individual from experiencing the intensity of the loss, (so it is good to grasp its positive role).

2. Bargaining. This stage may involve persistent thoughts about what could have been done to prevent the loss. People can become preoccupied with ways that things could have been better. Intense remorse or guilt

may interfere with the healing process if this stage is not adequately resolved. The next two points can simply be identified without explanation.

3. Depression.

4. Anger.

5. Acceptance. In time, an individual may be able to come to terms with various feelings and accept the fact that the loss has occurred. Healing can begin once the loss becomes a part of the individual's life experiences.

Many counselors and therapists add this thought —“*adjusting to a new reality.*” The mourner and their support system need to be willing to practice empathy in navigating a “*new normal.*”

- Recognize that while we are tempted to fix everything, it is essential to allow a person to have their grief process and not try to “fix” them.

- If someone you know wants your company during such a time as they enter into the grief process, you can dock alongside them and figuratively approach them with what I am going to share with you that has served me in over four decades of grief counseling.

- Often the most helpful thing to do is simply to listen empathically, that is, with all your attention and focus, as if that person were the only person in the world.

Here are a few tips from author David Brooks.

Be a loud listener.

When another person is talking, you want to be listening so actively that you're burning calories. Passionate, enthusiastic listening makes you feel good!

Story-fy whenever possible. I no longer ask people: What do you think about that? Instead, I ask: How did you come to believe that?

That gets them talking about the people and experiences that shaped their values. People are

much more revealing and personal when they are telling stories. And the conversation is going to be warmer.

Do the looping, especially with adolescents. People are not as clear as they think they are, and we're not as good at listening as we or they think they are. If you tell me something important and then I paraphrase it back to you, what psychologists call “looping,” we can correct any misunderstanding or wrong impression that may exist between us. Then, the person sharing with you knows that you do “get it” by looping back the correct thoughts.

Turn the person you are talking to into a narrator.

People may be hesitant to tell you their story when they tell you a story. Maybe past responses have caused them to not really tell the story.

Ask them specifics about the narrative. *Who, What, Where and When* kinds of questions and they will revisit the moment more concretely and tell a richer story.

Don't be a topper. If somebody shares their loss and you come back with “I know exactly what you mean, I had such pain and agony when my... (your loss or pain explained).” You may think you're

trying to build a shared connection, but what you are really doing is shifting attention back to yourself.

These last 5 points were modified from the book “How to Know a Person: The Art of Seeing Others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen” by David Brooks.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble” (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4).

Comforting you is God's specialty, and comforting others is a wonderful work that we can do! Like Father,

like son and daughter! It is well with our soul to be an instrument of comfort and consolation. □

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