

Loneliness of the Soul

1. Warm up: What are your plans for Thanksgiving? (Reminder: The church will host a pitch-in dinner at 1:00 pm on Thanksgiving Day in the Social Hall. To make reservations, use the Response Form found at LifeJourney.church/links.)
2. On Sunday, Jeff told the story of a kid growing up in a dysfunctional family that either argued or sat in sullen silence at the dinner table each evening. The boy would eat as fast as he could, then excuse himself, saying he was going outside to play. Instead, he'd run to the neighbors' house, sneak into their crawl space, and listen to their loving, uplifting dinner conversations, all while imagining what it would be like to be part of that family. Jeff compared that boy's experience to how our soul feels when separated from God.
 - a. Jeff said, "There's an almost universal human sense that we have been somehow separated from our Source, orphaned (if you will), and desperately need to reconnect. Our human spirit longs for connection, or reconnection, with the Divine Spirit." Do you think that's an accurate statement, *i.e.*, that most of us have, at some point, felt separated from God? If so, why do you think that is?
 - b. As you look back over your journey, when have you felt most disconnected from God? How would you describe what it feels like to feel disconnected from God?
 - c. Often as children we instinctively feel connected to God, only to drift away down the road. Anne Lamott tells how she grew up in a home where her Dad insisted that she agree not to believe in God. But Anne started "backsliding into faith" at an early age. "Even when I was a child," she says, "I knew that when I said 'Hello,' someone heard me." Did you have a childhood awareness of God? Where did that come from and how did it express itself for you?
3. Feeling disconnected from God is not the only problem we humans face. Our sense of disconnect is compounded by the desperation of simply trying to keep up with life. Just keeping up with everyday demands seems to take everything we've got. Our experience echoes the refrain in TS Eliott's famous poem, *The Wasteland*, where a disembodied voice repeats over and over again, "Hurry up, it's time! Hurry up, it's time!"
 - a. What do you think Elliott's famous line means? What's his point?
 - b. The movie *Wall-E* tells the story of a robot who, for 700 years, has been cleaning up trash left behind by humans on an abandoned planet earth. He's the last functioning robot and all alone. Each day he does his job, then comes home to the storage building where he lives. His only pass-time is TV and his collections of fascinating trinkets found when picking up trash. In one scene, Wall-E watches an old video tape of *Hello Dolly*, listening whimsically as Dolly and Hoarce hold hands and sing, "It only took a moment to be loved a whole life long." Wall-E pushes the button on his chest, records the song, then later replays it to himself outside as he gazes up at the infinite night sky, terribly alone. The whole idea is that we too can easily allow life to

turn us into mere task-oriented production robots cut off from what makes life truly beautiful – like relationships, especially relationship with God. Do you ever feel overly busy and in danger of becoming a mere task-oriented production robot? Tell us about the kind of things that push you in that direction.

4. There's only one thing in life that can ultimately address the loneliness of our soul and fill our life with meaning, *i.e.*, connecting, or reconnecting, with God. The first step in that process is to invite Jesus into our heart and receive him as Lord and Savior. But that's just the beginning of the process. From there we're supposed to go on to become genuine "friends of God," *i.e.*, to develop a close personal relationship with God. Jesus said to his followers, "I do not call you servants any longer . . . , but I have called you friends." John 15:15. What do you think Jesus meant? Describe what it looks like to be a friend of God.
5. One of the most basic characteristics of friendship is that friends talk. They talk a lot. They share everything – ups and downs, hopes and dreams, fears and failures, pain and joy. Friends talk! And that's what prayer is all about. A deep prayer life is essential to becoming genuine friends with God. All of which brings us to this week's key passage – a passage that tells us that, "The Lord used to speak to Moses face-to-face, as one speaks to a friend." The description of Moses' prayer life in this passage highlights four key points that can help us converse with God as a friend. Read Exodus 33:7-17 on p. 3.
 - a. **Step 1 – Go to your Tent of Meeting.** Verse 7 tells us that Moses pitched the Tent of Meeting "far off from the camp," and that's where he (and "everyone who sought the Lord") went to pray. The point being: If we want to have deep conversations with God, we need to schedule a regular time when we separate ourselves from the hustle and bustle of life and go to a quiet, private place. Where is that place for you – where is your Tent of Meeting? How often do you go there?
 - b. **Step 2 – Just Talk!** Verse 12, and the verses that follow, give us an example of how Moses prayed. His prayer times were not simply dry recitations of prayer requests. He poured out his heart to God. He spent time talking to God about what was on his heart. By way of example, Jeff suggested we regularly talk to God about things like: how yesterday went, what you expect today to bring, your hopes and dreams, your fears, how things are going with family and friends, and even the current state of politics. And he suggested we also speak out loud, so our prayers become more vivid and less distracted. Can you see yourself talking to God like that? Do you talk to God like that? If so, how does it feel? If you don't, what holds you back?
 - c. **Step 3 – Listen.** For Moses, prayer was a two-way conversation. He talked to God, then listened in his heart for what God was saying back to him. When you sense God saying something back to you, Jeff suggested we repeat it aloud to ourselves to evaluate it and let it soak in. When you pray, do you intentionally listen? Do you sense God speaking back to you? Suppose someone said, "How do you know that's God speaking?" What would you say?

- d. **Step 4 – No Filters.** To be meaningful, we have to be prepared to say whatever’s on our heart, even if it doesn’t feel very “holy” or “reverent.” Jeff said, “God prayer is good therapy.” What do you think that means? Do you allow yourself to say anything and everything to God? Why or why not?

Exodus 33:7-17, selected verses

⁷ Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; he called it the Tent of Meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the Tent of Meeting, which was outside the camp. ⁸ Whenever Moses went out to the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses.

¹¹ Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp; but his young assistant, Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the tent.

¹² Moses said to the LORD, “See, you have said to me, ‘Bring up this people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ ¹³ Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.”

¹⁴ God said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” ¹⁵ Moses said, “If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here.” ¹⁷ The LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.”