

*the*  
**PROVERBS 31**  
**MINISTRIES**  
*podcast*

**Biblical truth for any girl in any season.**

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Annie Downs: Okay. Well, I'm just so thankful to be here, and to be able to chat with y'all. I think this, what we're talking about today, is really important to me. It's not only that, that all of us can feel lonely. It's that all of us do feel lonely in the life that we have. I think a lot of people could look at our lives and look at each other and go like, "Well, I'm lonely because of this, this and this, but I bet they aren't." And I mean, y'all know me, I'm known for talking about fun. That's my thing, right? That's my guests, that's my book. Like, I'm known for talking about fun, but honestly, I think one of the gateways and one of the best ways to having genuine fun in your life is learning how to tell yourself the truth. Like you have to be able to tell yourself the truth, and if I'm looking at my life today, the top tier feeling I have isn't lonely, but it's in the mix. I do feel lonely today. I have pieces of my day, I'm not married yet, I don't have kids yet, and so I'm not around people from sun-up to sundown. And sometimes that makes me feel lonely.

Let me give you the definition of "lonely" because I think you'll find it actually interesting. It's "affected with or characterized by, or causing a depressing feeling of being alone, destitute of sympathetic, or friendly companionship or support." I mean, it is not just being by yourself; it's feeling destitute of sympathetic or friendly companionship. Just having someone say I understand, or I see you, or I know what's going on. I bet you feel that way. When we don't have people like that, we can feel really lonely.

I think a lot of us feel this. As I'm talking to my friends, you're probably experiencing this too, as I'm talking to my friends, my single friends feel really lonely. After a pandemic year, after being in our homes by ourselves a lot, and not having ways to meet new men or women. My single male and female friends feel incredibly lonely right now. My married friends, a lot of them feel lonely. They haven't seen their groups of friends, they haven't been with other couples, they haven't been able to do a lot of the things their normal lives had in it. And so, they feel lonely.

Parents can feel really lonely — so many of my mom friends were homeschooling their kids for the majority of the last school year, and they don't know what to do with that. They didn't train for that, they didn't sign up for that, except by birthing their children or adopting their children, but they can feel really lonely in this job as a mom, and their job as a teacher and their job as the person running their household, but not having the normal interactions that we have. So, whether you stay at home or you are out at a workplace, there are people that are incredibly lonely.

And it's not lonely in general, there's a real purposefulness to five things to do if you feel lonely in your life, not just in life, because maybe you are alone, or maybe you feel lonely because you feel misunderstood. That is one of my least favorite feelings in the world, is feeling misunderstood. And it

feels really lonely because you go, “Wait, I thought I explained myself.” I mean, it can happen to you on Instagram, it can happen at the neighborhood pool, it can happen on a phone call, and you go, “I thought we were on the same page.” And I don't know that we would immediately call that feeling lonely, but often, that's what it is. It's loneliness.

Maybe you have COVID, or someone you love has as COVID and you've been exposed to it, and you're literally alone, and you are quarantined by yourself, or maybe you're the only Christian in your family, or the only Christian family in your neighborhood, and that can feel really lonely. There are some churches in our country that still aren't gathering normally yet. None of, I don't know that any of them are gathering as normally as like everybody sitting by everybody without masks, and it can feel really lonely in our faith. You could be the only person in your community with your skin color. You could be the only person in your online community with your skin color, with your socioeconomic background, with the country of origin where you came from. And that can feel so lonely.

I used to live in Scotland, which is a first-world country that speaks English, that has Starbucks, that shops at H&M, I mean, you would not know we were not from the same country until you get into some conversations where there some confusing things between two first-world countries, and when I lived there, I felt really alone sometimes because I felt misunderstood, even though it looked like I should have fit in just fine. And you may feel really lonely because of what's going on politically. You may stand in a different spot than a lot of your friends, or your neighbors, or your family, and it can just feel lonely.

So, I think the first permission I want to give is that if any part of your life feels lonely, we believe you. Like, I believe you. I believe that you feel lonely, even though you're married and have 18 kids in the house. I believe you feel lonely, even though you are sure that you voted the way your heart told you to vote. I believe you feel lonely, even if you're getting to sit in church, like I believe you. I want you to hear that we believe you.

So, what happens next? And how do we handle what we do with that for this next season? And as much as I believe you, I really want you to believe yourself. If you think, I think I feel lonely here, I want you to believe yourself because no one can be a better friend to you right now than you. Like, being a good friend to yourself is really important.

Y'all know this about me. It matters to me how I talk to myself. It matters to me when I'm getting ready in the morning, what the thoughts are going back and forth in the mirror. And one of the things that I have done for myself repeatedly is, and this will happen when I'm reading Scripture, when I'm sitting and studying the Bible, I'll go, “Why does that matter so much to you?” I mean, it's almost like interviewing yourself or being an investigative, curious friend towards yourself. If someone else said to you, I feel kind of lonely in my marriage, but I don't know if I'm allowed to feel that. Well, of course you're allowed to feel that. Why do you feel that? Like, I've looked in the mirror and gone, “What makes you feel so lonely today?” I've thought about it, and I've thought, “Well, I think it's because there's something to celebrate and I don't know who to call to invite them to celebrate with me.” Or a sad thing is happening, and I don't know who to tell. And so just be a good friend to yourself.

In fact, 2 Corinthians, this is Chapter 4, verses 8 and 9, “*We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*”

So, you don't have to pretend to be okay. Scripture says we're hard pressed on every side, so don't force yourself to be all right. You absolutely are allowed to feel lonely.

There's this place in Nashville called Onsite. It's outside of Nashville. It's like a counseling intensive. Y'all know, Jim Cress, who's on a lot with Lysa, Jim is one of the counselors at Onsite. He was my small group leader, y'all know that? Isn't that wild? Like at the end of the week, when we're allowed to like talk about, you're there for a week of like, just doing some good work on your story. And at the end of it, when you're allowed to kind of say like, "Hey, here's who I am, here's my last name, here's what I do." He was like, I know, you're friends with Lysa. It was awesome. Jim is one of the best. He's so wise.

But one of the things they said at Onsite is, you take these, like this quiz on the medicators that you have in your life. And they go through all of it. And it's and it's medicine, of course, it's drugs, but there's also is alcohol on medicator? Or is food medicator? Or is Instagram on medicator? Is exercise a medicator? Or are there things you were using because what they say is, when the medicines are gone, the feelings are there. And man did I experience that, like we are hard pressed on every side, and we can either feel that or medicate that. And I would just encourage my friends listening, like, if you want a genuinely fun life, if you want it to get better than this, you have to stop medicating. You have to start feeling your feelings.

Now I'm not telling you to have surgery without some sort of medicine to numb the area. There are times where there is a short amount of time, I write about it in *That Sounds Fun*, about when I was really brokenhearted, one day, and I just had to go see a movie. Like I just need to go sit in a movie theater and not think about anything for two hours and 10 minutes. I didn't do that for 12 days, but for two hours and 10 minutes, to be medicated in short times, I think makes a little bit of sense. It makes sense medically, and so I think spiritually it's okay if there's moments, but when you've medicated for your life, because you don't want to feel your feelings, we got to, we got to quit that is what I'm going to say. We've got to quit that.

So, first thing if you have the five things to do when you feel lonely in your life, you have to tell yourself the truth and believe yourself. And then also, go outside. I know that sounds really basic, but something happens when you get outside, when you see nature, when you see the seasons changing. We're just getting glimpses of the days getting longer, of course it's February — I mean, it's winter. I can't like deceive myself and be like, is it almost July? It's not. It's not. It is February. But what I am noticing is the days are getting longer. And the way the sun is setting into my office and into my house windows is changing.

And when I can get outside in that, when I get outside and see the trees and start hearing the birds chirping, our mutual friend Emily P. Freeman has this journal, her "next right thing" journal, and one of the things that says is, "in the quiet, what do you hear?" And yesterday, I wrote down I heard a bird, and I heard birds chirping in a while. And so, there's something about getting outside in nature that absolutely heals something in me, even in my loneliness, because it's just a reminder you're not alone.

As I'm talking to you, I'm looking out the window in my office, and I'm just going, "Oh yeah, like all these trees have each other. And when they are full of leaves, they have me too. They cover me they shelter me they care for me like that." And it just is such a good reminder that we are not alone. And so, when you get outside and you see the seasons changing, and you experience what God is doing in that,

believe what nature is telling you — that the seasons are changing, that something beautiful is coming, that there is purpose in the death of winter, because something's happening underground. Like if when you're walking, you can be telling yourself what's true about nature, you will actually learn what's true about you too and what you're going through.

And then I would also say, you should be, if you feel lonely in your life, get online and find people who are experiencing some of the things you're experiencing, but do it with boundaries, right? Like there's community online for sure. I am so thankful for the groups of friends that I'm in online, a group of friends that I exercise with, we all do the same exercises, we're all in a group. I have a Marco Polo group with my closest girlfriends. We all got quarantined, like, real early, I think y'all remember this. I got quarantined like the first week of March because we had all watched — wait for it — the Bachelor season finale together. And the next day, a girl tested positive, that's what I get. And so, she tested positive the next morning, and so before our country was locked down, I was locked down. And in that loneliness, at least I had Marco Polo where we can all see each other's faces. Right?

So, we've got to go online in certain ways, and find communities, whether it's online dating, which I'm actually a big fan of. I think there are some sites that are very safe and are very healthy, and if you have a community in it with you, I mean, Meredith, let's tell the truth. You're in that with me. You are in my, when I am in a dating situation, when I'm meeting a man, I tell you all about us. And we, I don't do this by myself. I don't do relationship with men by myself. And so even online dating can be really safe in a real good way. I mean, I know a ton of people who are doing first dates on Zoom because they're like, well, I'm not going to risk getting COVID if I don't even like talking to you, right? It's happening all over the place. I know moms' groups that have formed during COVID that are helping with, you know, you didn't talk to the other second grade moms when your son was in the class. But when y'all are all teaching this weird way to teach math, there's a reason to connect over it. Right? If you feel lonely in your life, get online with boundaries and with community.

And then, as we're just talking about, I mean, you need to tell someone. If you feel lonely, do not keep it to yourself. Even if you listen, listen is a funny word, if you listen to the disciples all throughout the Gospels, they're talking about how they're feeling. They're telling Jesus how they're feeling. Last year in 2020, my Bible reading plan, my pastor here in Nashville, Pastor Kevin, he always says have a plan and a place. If you want to read the Bible every day, have a plan and a place. And so, I have this one chair in my house that I always drink my tea, and I sit in my swirly chair, and last year, my plan was reading the Gospels every month. So, I read the same four books 12 times, and it was awesome. It changed my life forever. It changed my life forever.

And, and one of the things I noticed was how much the disciples actually communicate with Jesus what they're feeling, and when they're in the boat and they're afraid, when they're sitting beside him at the Last Supper, and He says someone's going to betray him, and then Peter says to John, “ask Him who.” Right? Like they're in communication a lot, we've got to tell people. The thing is you can't expect anyone else to solve your loneliness. That is a big thing about loneliness is you can't, it's not an exchange; you can't give somebody cash and then give you back a lack of loneliness, you know? Like, you can't call someone and go, I feel lonely, and then be disappointed when they can't fix it.

The healing comes from telling, not from receiving. The healing to loneliness is actually admitting it to yourself and admitting it to people that you love. You need to tell someone when you feel it, not if you

feel it, because spoiler alert, we all feel it. Everyone feels lonely. And so, you're not going to tell someone else that you're lonely and them not understand that feeling. There are times when you go through something and you go, "I just don't know if anybody else knows what this is like to, to lose a child like this, to lose a relationship like this to, to feel this particular feeling." It's like, well, if you're coming with lonely, we all know. We all know. So, call someone and tell them. Invite them in it. We see it modeled all over Scripture.

And I would say, I was sitting with, and I think y'all know, I think you know Nancy Mattingly. I don't know if y'all know her but she's kind of a mentor to a lot of us that do this job. And I was telling her I was talking to y'all about this, and I was like, "Man, I don't know what else to tell people about not being lonely. You're, you know, a couple years ahead in life to me." She has children my age and grandchildren and, and we were getting coffee, and she said, "Well, when I feel lonely, I just go and serve." And I was like — that is such a Christianese answer. That's such Christianese you're given us. But I, so I kind of pushed into it, and I was kind of like, okay, tell me why Nancy. And she said, "You can handle loneliness. What you can't handle is purposelessness. And if you will find a purpose, it will heal some of the lonely." And I was like, you know what? That isn't Christianese. That's just truth. Like, that's just truth. We cannot handle being purposeless. We can handle being alone, but we cannot handle being purposelessness.

So, call someone and be a listening ear. If you still have a living grandparent, what I would give to call my grandparents. I mean, what a waste of my twenties that I did not talk to them more when they were here. And I feel that with my parents. My parents won't live for another 200 years. And so, I want to call my parents and listen to them and hear what's going on with them. And whether it's going down, we have a local place here in Nashville called The Store that Brad Paisley and Kimberly Williams Paisley started, that is like literally going to, it's a grocery store for underprivileged families, that they come and get to shop like a normal grocery store, but it doesn't cost them anything. It's beautiful. So, I'm like, when I feel lonely, why don't I go and volunteer at the store? Right? When I feel lonely, I should call and listen to someone talk about their story. When I feel lonely, can I go to one of my married friends' houses that has kids at five o'clock at the end of the day, and be the one who handles witching hour with the children?

Can I do that because it's a way that, it hits, it kills two birds with one stone because it solves a problem for my parenting friends who are exhausted, and it helps me serve, and I'm not alone. And so, let me go through those again just real quick. If someone was not able to take notes, they were driving, but now they're at home, or they've pulled over or whatever. Believe in yourself and sit in it. If you feel lonely in your life, believe in yourself and sit in it. Go outside, trust what nature is telling you. Get online, but with boundaries. Tell someone how you're feeling. And serve somewhere.

And I'm also a person who will not say, "so that means you'll never be lonely again." It just means that your loneliness, in the lives we have, your loneliness will take on new purpose. Your vulnerability will move people and change other people, and you're telling the truth to yourself opens up this gate that allows you to walk toward being genuinely you, which helps you find more genuine fun in your life and allows God to step in in a new way. He says "come to Me all who are weary and burdened," right? He doesn't say, sit and wait on Me all who are weary and burdened. He says "come to Me, take a step toward Me." And so, when you are honest about your loneliness, when you start making moves in your loneliness, I have this picture in my mind of a gate just opening and you stepping into this big open field

where Jesus is like, “Hey, you step toward Me. Let Me handle this for you.” And so that's my prayer, is that is that these tips, while they're kind of easy to think through, once you execute them, you're actually changing your life.

Meredith Brock: Mm-hmm. Wow. That's so good Annie. One of the things that I think is really important for today, in our kind of self-cure, self-care, immediate healing kind of culture is, are these medicators that we go to like drugs, alcohol, exercise, even I think going to someone is like self-medicating in a way.

Kaley Olson: Social media.

MB: Yeah, social media.

KO: Just scroll, scroll, scroll.

MB: Or even kind of having that habit of, I'm going to feel lonely, so I'm going to go to my friend before I go to God. And so, I think for me, I definitely understand, going, having people that you go to whenever you're feeling lonely, but what about that time where maybe that's not the best initial reaction. Like is there, is there a length of time maybe you personally will sit with your loneliness and allow God to speak to you before you reach out to someone and what does that look like?

AD: Gosh, that's a beautiful thought. And yes, that's true. I think so. I think it's one of the reasons we should spend time with God in the morning. I think it's one of the reasons that I don't like to “should” people, so I “should,” “shouldn't” “should.” But I think one of the reasons I benefit from spending time with God in the morning is He gets all my first feelings. Right? Like He is, so even in my brain, I didn't even quite process that as I was writing this because that's where my first feelings go. And so yeah, I mean, I think that's the sentence is, He gets your first feelings, just like He gets a tithe, just like He gets a Sabbath, and He gets your first day of the week, if you Sabbath like that — you can't always if you work in church or whatever, but He gets your first 10%, and He gets your first feelings.

MB: I love that.

AD: I think that's the way I would encourage that and say that is, let Him have your first feelings and then invite people in.

MB: I love that, Annie. Honestly, I think that goes right along with that step one that you said: tell the truth. Like you telling the truth to yourself and sitting and telling the truth to your God and saying, you know, this is, I feel lonely Lord, you know, and I feel disenfranchised and left out and all of those things. It honestly reminds me of earlier in this year, when quarantine started, I happened to be in this really, and Kaley's going to be like, “Meredith, I've heard this so many times.”

KO: I'm right. I'm here for it.

MB: But I was deep in studying the idea of wilderness throughout the Bible. And why I was like, so many times, you see God lead His beloved, someone who He loves, into a wilderness, where He did it

with the Israelites, He did it with Rahab, He did it with — oh, gosh, I'm going — He did it with Jesus. Oh, yeah, yeah. He did it with Elijah. I mean, He just did it over and over and over again. And often times for us, I think in this, in our culture today, loneliness is wilderness. But it looks so very different. We're not actually going to wander out into a desert, are we? I mean, maybe some of our friends listening live in Arizona somewhere, and the Lord leads them out into the desert.

But for most of us, it's that place of, I have no one to turn to. I have no one to talk to. And I really think these steps Annie help someone process in that moment because if we don't process well in that moment, we can even just look back at the Israelites, they had two choices there. Either they could turn to God and foster the intimacy that He was hoping to have, that special relationship where they relied solely on Him, or they could turn to medicators, which was worshipping other gods. And that's what they did. And it created a rift between them and their Savior who so desperately wanted those first feelings, you know.

So, I think I just want to say to our listeners, if you're in that place right now where you're just feeling lonely, maybe you are, I can speak to it. I mean, I have three kids that I manage and my husband. And normally, there is a small human body attached to my body in some way, but I still feel lonely, you guys, because that — that sweet, little, 11-month-old baby is not going to understand the complex feelings I have about what I face that day. And so, I have to make the choice to tell those feelings to the Lord.

AD: I mean, isn't that the lie that we, so many of us believe as married people? I know a lot of married people who would think, well, how can my single friends feel lonely? They have, they get to be with their friends so much. And they like they get to choose, they don't have to do this, this and this. And single people think when I get married, I won't be lonely. Right? Like we've all got this idea that the other side of the fence or people who don't have kids yet, and people who do have kids, right? It's the grass. The reason people say the grass is always greener is because everybody thinks the grass is always greener.

But when it comes to loneliness, we really think everybody else has it easier than me. And the thing we have to do is hold, it's almost like a picture, like an escalator. It's almost like you're on that spectrum somewhere of loneliness. So, you're right. There are people who have an easier than you, but there are people that have it harder than you. So, you can pull your experience off the escalator and hold it and say, "Yes, I have a very unique experience." This is uniquely painful, and also, I'm on a spectrum. I'm on a spectrum of loneliness. And both are true. And if we force ourselves to go, "Well, I'm not as lonely as ..." or did it just only pay attention to where you're on the spectrum, then you're missing out on honoring your own story. But if you pull yourself out of the bigger story, then you are going to feel sorry for yourself all the time. And that doesn't lead to help.

MB: Yeah, and you just said something that I was just like, oh my gosh! You said, you know, the grass is always greener, they have it better. Again, bringing it right back to that story. Isn't that what the Israelites said? We want to be like the other nations. So y'all, this is a human condition, not an individual condition. We all struggle with this place of discontentment. Whether, you know loneliness is such a symptom of it, because we weren't meant to be distant from our God. And you can use that loneliness to plunge you into deeper intimacy with our Lord or you can use it to plunge you into more discontentment and disenfranchisement from Him which is the ultimate solution to that loneliness and discontentment.

Good stuff! My goodness, Annie, you're just, you're just coming on dropping the heat this morning. I love it. Seriously, thank you so much for being on the show today. What a treat to have you with us. For those of you listening, you'll be happy to know in just a second we are going to turn on the Zoom cameras here in Charlotte, and we're going to continue our conversation with Annie for our podcast insider interview, and you can get exclusive access to this interview by signing up for our podcast insider email list at [Proverbs31.org/listen](https://Proverbs31.org/listen).

KO: Yes, and you guys are going to want to know that Annie just released a brand-new book called *That Sounds Fun: The Joys of Being an Amateur, The Power of Falling in Love and Why You Need a Hobby*. That book sounds fun, right, Meredith?

MO: I mean, I genuinely, because Annie and I are friends, we have not really talked about this book yet, and I'm like "amateur, falling in love, hobbies," all of these things. I can't wait to talk about this. You guys can get it anywhere books are sold. We'll link it in the show notes.

KO: That's right. And we only release podcast episodes every two to three times per month, so let's get you guys connected to encouragement on a regular basis, not just through the podcast, so sign up for our free *Encouragement for Today* daily devotions and you'll get relevant, biblically based content sent straight to your inbox every single weekday. So, sign up for that at [Proverbs31.org](https://Proverbs31.org).

MB: All right, friends. Thanks so much for joining us today at Proverbs 31. We say this all the time, but we know that we believe when you know the Truth and live the Truth of God's Word. It changes everything. We'll see you next time.