

## LL25-Savoring Loneliness

I'm Alvean Lyons,  
And I'm Doug Weiss and welcome to LoveLife

In a few of our other conversations Douglas we've talked about loneliness and the difference between being alone versus feeling lonely and what that means and how that affects us in various kinds of ways in the context of a relationship. This week's question from one of our listeners is whether or not loneliness can be therapeutic? Are there good things that can come out of loneliness that help us to find out who we really are as people? So what do you think.

Well I think the answer is yes and there's probably not a topic that I don't hear more of. This is a very common theme. I hear people saying, I feel alone, I feel lonely and there's a sense of unhappiness connected with that. This is not a good state of being to be in. And I certainly understand that, I have experienced being alone, and being lonely. In my own case, what it forced me to do was to step back and ask why? What is it that I'm experiencing here? What is it that I'm missing, that's not being fulfilled? This is not easy, but if you stay with it for a while, if you if you savor it, you lean into it, you might find a couple of things. First, that you like yourself a bit in that being with yourself is fun. In contrast to our topic last week: you're not the boss of me, you would be wrong, I am the boss of me. I can decide to do this, I can decide to do that, I don't need anybody else to make that decision for me, I can make it for myself. Or in a perhaps more contemplative way enjoy the quiet, the peace, the solitude. I think it's three o'clock in the morning and I decide that I want to learn how to make chocolate mousse, I can do that; by the way I have not done that. I think that the therapy that's alluded to here is the therapy of being with one's self and exploring what we feel, what we think, who we are. And sometimes you have to ask painful questions to get there. Painful only because they reveal things that we may not have up front and present in our minds; may not even be things we want to explore. Maybe we've repressed them or maybe they are difficult things. You may say I don't like that about myself. Well the good news is you can change it. Or you may discover that there are things you really do like about yourself and you may discover that those are things that are particular strengths and that if you were to bring those more to the surface you would have a richer experience in life. But it all begins with that introspection. I would love your take on this Alvean. There

are people who have said to me, people I've been in relationship with who said I'm not an introspective person. I don't like to go there. I don't want to peel back the layers, I don't want to see what's inside .

What they're really saying is they're afraid of themselves. And it makes me think about a movie that I enjoyed very much. Runaway Bride, if you've ever seen it , with Julia Roberts playing opposite Richard Gere. I think you'd be very entertained by it, but in the movie basically Julia, over and over again gets all the way up to the wedding and ends up running. She never seems to be able to get past that threshold to become somebody's wife because of some issues that exist, but nobody could put their finger on it over the years. Richard Gere was very interested in the story that he kept hearing in the small town and he decides that he's going to go report on the story and ends up falling in love with Julia Roberts in the process. And without ruining it, there comes a point that Richard says to her that she really doesn't know who she is, because she has jumped from relationship to relationship and Julia ends up having to spend a moment alone after running from the last marriage. She spent some time alone to figure out what it is that makes her who she is. She didn't even know one of the things he did. When he asked all of her previous fiances how does she like her eggs, every single man gave a different answer. One of the things that she did when she was by her self was to figure out what was her favorite style of eggs. She didn't even know herself because she was always the reflection of whoever she was with and I think that therapy that we are speaking to is the importance of knowing who you are. So that you as a whole individual are meeting this other person, a whole individual and that together you create a whole relationship. But when you don't even know who you are, it's literally like trying to make or get directions from point A to Point B. but you don't know where Point A is, so the G.P.S. cannot take you to where you want to go because you have no starting point. Relationships require starting points so that I am here and here doesn't have to be a perfect place but at least I know where I am and you are there and there doesn't have to be a perfect place but least I know where you are and we can move from these two definite locations to wherever we need to go together. But that is virtually impossible if both of us or one of us is significantly unclear about our identity and having time alone gives you a chance to start to examine that and that's the thing that some people are afraid of. What will I discover about me if I actually have to be my own best friend.

I have a friend who's not a particularly religious person but a very spiritual person and by that I mean someone who absolutely has a strong abiding relationship with God, but not in any conventional sense. Doesn't go to church, doesn't pray in the sense of any kind of formal process; her prayer is walking on the beach. Which she does often alone, and is perfectly content. She can be gone for hours walking on the beach. When I lived in New Hampshire my temple, my church was the woods. I loved walking through unbeaten paths. These tall majestic pine trees that grew in this particular part of New Hampshire where I lived. And it was quiet, but not silent. I was alone with myself by choice. Alone with myself and I just let my mind go. Not quite mindfulness meditation, but let my mind go where it was going to go but with a thought in the back of my mind that I had before I went into the woods. Often my friend says she has something on her heart that she wants to think about and she uses that long walk with the waves in the background as a form of meditation. I think that this is the kind of being alone with yourself that is incredibly healthy and if you enter into it without a fear that you're going to find something you might not like, then you're going to have a richer experience. And you may indeed find some things that you're not happy about, but you're not going to find them in a threatening way.

And to your point, I always think that if you don't enjoy your own company, how then can you expect somebody else to enjoy your company because much of our interaction is governed by our sense of selfworth and comfort in our own skin. If I'm afraid to be alone with my own thoughts, then who would want to sit in those thoughts with me? Taking into relationship a fear of really being vulnerable per our previous shows. If I open all of me you will then see the very things that I'm afraid of seeing about myself and if I can get comfortable with those things, my imperfections, my issues, even my ugly spots; if I can get comfortable with them. I'm not apathetic about them because we all need to grow, but comfortable that it makes it easier for me to share that space with someone else so that we may grow together. So being alone with ourselves is an opportunity to be able to not be afraid of looking at ourselves naked in the proverbial mirror.

I have a propensity for having conversations with God, I call them that. It's not Praying, they're just conversations and they can occur anywhere any time. Often in the car, that's a good place, sometimes walking in the woods or on the beach or someplace like that but sometimes they just happen while I'm doing yardwork. It doesn't matter where it is. I think what's common about those conversations

for me is that they are an opportunity for me to talk out loud about what's on my heart. And in those conversations I can say things like I'm uncomfortable about this, I don't know what I should do about that, I don't know what how I feel about this. And I can also say things like I'm not very happy about how I handled that. But there's no judgment attached to that, because I feel perfectly comfortable. God's not judging me, he's already forgiven me for all the stupid things I've done. And the context of those conversations is a kind of introspection that allows me to have an honest dialogue with myself about who I am, what I think, what's concerning me in a healthy way. It's not bottled up, it's not pushed aside, sublimated or rejected in some inappropriate way but instead in a kind of thoughtful quiet, peaceful way I can allow those thoughts to come to the surface. And I can be critical of myself in those moments without beating myself up I can say you didn't do a really good job of that or I was really particularly bullheaded wasn't I? I have a friend who years ago, he's now deceased, but years ago I ran into him one day and because I hadn't seen him for a while I asked where he had been and he said lately I've been having beers with God. You had to know the guy. I thought that was a very funny way to put it, but he had learned the same secret that I had. For him it was walk out on his back deck and with a bottle of beer, and have a talk with God. And I just I love the straightforwardness of that comment because it's exactly how I approach it and I've talked to a lot of other people who have this same habit, who have found the way. If you want to talk to God ok, or pick somebody that you want to talk to. I'm not telling you what you should do, but I am telling you to have a conversation, have it out loud. Talk out the things that are in your heart that's the great way to avoid turning being alone into loneliness.

We have to learn to be our own best friends. We tend to be more kind in the way that we talk to others than in the way that we talk to ourselves and if we learn to be our own best friends, being alone will not feel like loneliness rather it will be the best friendship you've ever created because you started first with yourself and then you can invite someone else in.

That is another incredible episode of love life. Sometimes the things that come out in these conversations, I think stunn us as much as I think our listeners. We so treasure you, our listeners. We want also to thank our friends Barbara Ham m Lee, our producer and Todd Washburn our recording engineer, for their friendship. We hope to be with you next week for another episode.

