Retreat: Guided Meditation on Loneliness

(NOTE: The reader or readers should speak slowly and deliberately so everyone can take in the message of the meditation.)

Loneliness is a feeling of emptiness... a negative feeling that can occur when we feel alone. It is possible to be lonely even when other people are around. A feeling of loneliness signifies an unmet need. Dealing with loneliness can be difficult, but a good first step is to face the feeling.

Before you deal with loneliness, begin by becoming more relaxed. Choose a comfortable position, and take a few moments just to breathe.

Allow yourself to breathe slowly and naturally, doing nothing else in this moment besides concentrating on your breaths.

Breathe in ... and out ... allowing each breath to calm and relax you. Continue breathing calmly, at whatever pace is comfortable for you.

Let's use mental focus to help you relax. All you need to do is count up from one to five, then back down to one. I'll count with you for a while, and then you can count on your own. Try to count in time with your breathing, counting each time you breathe out.

One...
Two...
Three...
Four...
Five...
Four...
Three...
Two...
One...
Two...
Three...
Four...
Five...
Four...
Three...
Two...
One...

Keep counting on your own now. Allow your muscles to become relaxed and loose. And focus completely on the numbers – becoming more and more relaxed with each number. More deeply relaxed.
Now let's start to deal with loneliness.

Think for a moment about how you are feeling. Notice any feelings of loneliness you may have. What does the loneliness feel like to you? Where do you feel it in your body? Some people experience a heavy feeling in the stomach ... or a feeling of emptiness or aching in the chest. You don't need to start dealing with the loneliness just yet ... simply experience it ... noticing what it is like.

Loneliness is an unpleasant feeling ... but stay with this feeling for a few more moments. You do not need to deal with loneliness yet, just notice the feeling. What needs do you have that are not being met right now? What is your heart telling you? What needs to change? A specific situation? Your outlook? Perhaps some of your actions?

You can use this feeling of loneliness to explore what it is that you need, and to make changes to deal with loneliness so you can feel content. Concentrate on the feeling of loneliness. What are you thinking about when you focus on the loneliness? Perhaps you have images in your mind of ways that you want your life to be different. Maybe you are thinking about being alone. Maybe you miss someone. What thoughts or images go through your mind as you focus on being lonely?

Who have you reached out to for guidance? A loved one? Or do you usually keep to yourself?

Do you experience loneliness even in the midst of a busy lifestyle? Amongst a group of people gathered like in church? How about feeling lonely in your relationships?

Where is God in this picture? How has God played a role in your experience of loneliness? A source of consolation? A provider of peace? Or perhaps giver of empty promises? What is your relationship with God when it comes to your own vulnerabilities?

Think about the past week or month and how many times you connected with a specific person. It can be anyone -- your significant other ... your parent ... a sibling ... a mentor.
... a friend you haven’t seen in awhile ... a co-worker ... that stranger you always see on your way to or from work ... your local priest ... Who is that person?

How did you interact with that person? Did you have any telephone conversations? Did you read or send any emails or texts? Did you say hello to anyone in the store? Did you read or write any letters? Did you visit that person? Did they surprise or shock you in some way?

Think about the number of connections you had with that person. Were there more connections than you expected? Or were there less? Were they close in terms of quality, or more superficial? Are you just feeling lonely today, or were you lonely for the rest of this past week or so, too?

(Pause)

Everyone feels lonely sometimes. Loneliness is a normal, natural feeling that we all experience. All people deal with loneliness at some time in their lives. This feeling helps to push us to interact more, to get closer to people, to risk in order to have close relationships.

In this way, loneliness can be a good thing. What is your feeling of loneliness pushing you to do?

(Pause)

Is it asking you to seek out company and communication? Think about people you could call to talk to, or people you could go see face to face. What about groups or clubs you can join?

How about being content with your own company. How do you feel when you are alone? Do you find yourself to be good company?

Concentrate on the loneliness, on the aching, empty feeling inside ... and now imagine that feeling shifting, just slightly ...

Imagine a feeling of peace ... contentment ... happiness ...

Picture this feeling, as if it is a warm liquid. Imagine that the liquid can fill your body, pouring in through the top of your head ... so warm and pleasant.

Imagine this liquid filling your body ... being poured down, filling up your feet ... then your legs ... rising higher ... to your knees ... to your hips ...
Feel the warmth filling the core of your body ... up to your stomach ... chest ... all the way to your shoulders ... pouring down to your hands and filling your arms ... up to your elbows ... to your upper arms ...

Feel the warmth filling your neck and your head ... filling your whole body with a feeling of warmth and peace. Feel an even greater warmth beginning at the center of your stomach and radiating outward ... as if the sun is shining inside you.

Let this feeling of warmth and peace grow ... experiencing a feeling of happiness inside.

Feel the warmth growing ... growing ... until joy is radiating from you, as if your whole body is shining, glowing ... radiating joy and happiness.

Inside you feel full, solid ... filled with contentment. Imagine any remaining feelings of emptiness being crowded out completely by the warmth inside you.

When you are so content, there is no room for emptiness.

Allow yourself to feel peaceful and serene, even for just a few moments. Right now, everything is as it should be. You are perfectly okay, just as you are. You feel joyful ... loved ... surrounded by warmth ...

You are worth all of the positive things that come your way. You have a lot to offer in relationships with others. Feel the happiness radiating from you, and imagine this joy shining forth, like the sun shining down on everyone around you. Feel a sense of connection with the world around you ... you are a part of this world ... part of the fabric of your community.

The connections you have can expand and grow ... allowing you to become even more connected with people.

You are filled with confidence ... contentment ... secure and confident with a strong sense of self ...

All alone, you can be happy and content without feeling lonely, because nothing is missing when you are by yourself. You are perfectly alright by yourself. You do not need anyone else to be whole. Other people can enrich your life, but you are whole all on your own.

Experience a feeling of wholeness ... completeness ... right now. Experience this feeling fully ... peaceful ... whole ... content ... complete ... happy ...

(Pause)
Any time you begin to feel lonely in the future, you can deal with loneliness by experiencing these feelings of contentment again. You can also take action to spend time with others, so that you can be connected with people and not feel lonely.

It's time to conclude this relaxation exercise. Keep with you the feelings of contentment and peace, as you reawaken your mind and body.

Gradually return to full alertness ... stretch your muscles, feeling your body waking up.

Take a deep, cleansing breath in ... and as you breathe out, become more awake and alert.

Sit quietly for a few moments with your eyes open, reorienting yourself to your surroundings.

When you are fully awake and alert, you can return to what lies ahead, feeling confident and content.