
FROM A FATHER'S PERSPECTIVE

A Parent's Challenge to Create in Our Children an Understanding of Loneliness

December 2009

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In 1961, Clark E. Moustakas published a book entitled *Loneliness*. His study of the topic was concluded with a poignant, but brief, chapter on the value of loneliness which opens with a simple sentence, "To love is to be lonely." He further elaborates:

All love leads to suffering. If we did not care for others in a deep and fundamental way, we would not experience grief when they are troubled or disturbed, when they face tragedy or misfortune, when they are ill or dying. Every person is ultimately confronted with the pain of separation or death, with tragic grief which can be healed in silence and isolation. When pain is accepted and felt as one's own, at the center of being, then suffering grows into compassion for other human beings and all living creatures. Through pain, the heart opens and out of the sorrow comes new sensations of levity and joy (Moustakas, p.101).

The challenge of dealing with loss-imposed loneliness and translating that into the levity and joy accompanying the opening of one's heart to the world around them is intensified when emotion is suffered by a child. The complexity of explaining the largely unexplainable loss of a loved one to a child is a formidable challenge. This often involves the exploration with the child of the nature of the relationship lost in an effort to understand how others who are genuinely concerned with the child's welfare can fill, but not replace, that void. Guiding the child to a better understanding that the imprint made on his/her soul by the lost individual hastens movement to finding the next generation of individuals prepared to complement his/her continued development. We are assured by Moustakas that through the loss-induced loneliness will emerge new sensations of levity and joy.

The recent loss of our dear friend Keith Schwer tests our understanding of loneliness. Keith's grandchildren beamed with pride about the meaning of their relationship with their grandfather, but in doing so they too had begun their search for not a replacement for their wise grandfather, but for those who can extend the imprint he had so skillfully made upon them. May each of us reach out to honor our obligation to bring joy and levity to their lives and those of other children feeling the loneliness of loss.

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