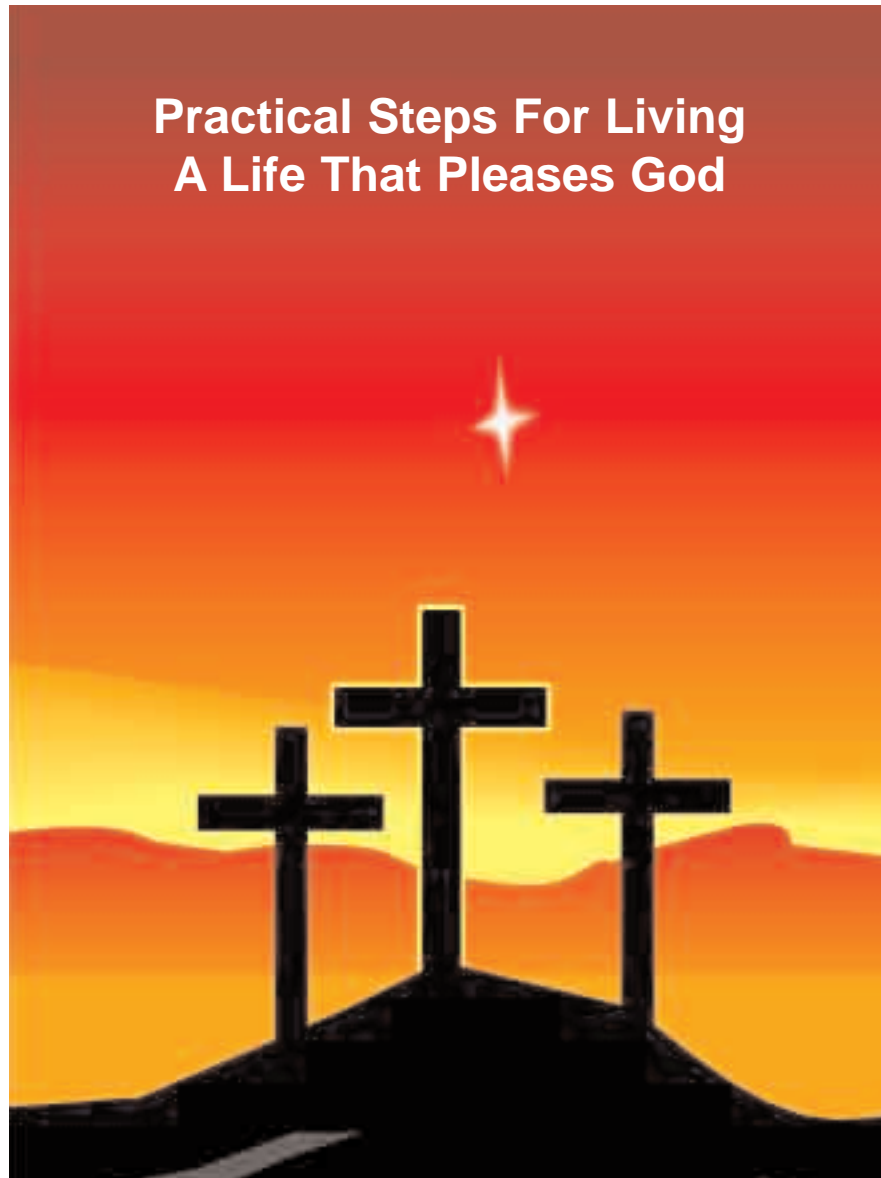


Lifebytes:

6. Feeling Left Out



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Dear Friends,

Have you ever felt like you were the ‘odd man out’? Have you experienced times when you just didn’t seem to fit in with everyone around you? These perceptions are much more common than you may realize. Almost everyone you may think of as “in” experiences the same sense of being “out”. Because of the Fall of our first parents, these negative feelings are common to all mankind. [See our workbook, **Demolishing Strongholds**, a free download at our website.]

Yet, it’s one thing for people to feel sorrow that they’re being “left out”. But it’s quite another when we followers of Jesus either make people feel that way, or fail to help and encourage them when they are experiencing the lonely isolation of being left out.

In this Lifebyte we want to address some situations that cause people to feel left out. Some of these you may have experienced yourself, while some you may not have even thought about. We also want to remind you of your biblical responsibility to help those in the Body who are suffering in their exclusion.

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:12)

When you are free from seeing Christianity through the lens of a system of religious practices and observances, you become much more aware of God’s lifegiving commands for your life. Part of your love-grounded obedient trust entails how you treat others. The **minimal criteria** is that you treat others just as you would want to be treated. But to follow Jesus in a way that brings Him

praise requires so much more.

Jesus pictorializes several principles about our responsibility to those who are left out. The first is found in the parable of the **Lost Sheep** in Luke 15:1-7. While this parable addresses how important the repentance of one person is, we must recognize that **someone left the crowd** to go after that lone stray.

In His penetrating teaching on the separation of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus nails the criteria for acceptance into heaven. He also warns of the dreadful consequences of *not* offering His compassion to the needy.

*Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me **nothing to eat**, I was thirsty and you gave me **nothing to drink**, I was a stranger and you did **not invite me in**, I needed clothes and you did **not clothe me**, I was sick and in prison and you did **not look after me.**’*

*They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ ‘He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, **whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.**’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life (vv. 41-46).*

Our Father commands that each of His children actively represent His Son Jesus in our treatment of others. In other words, He expects us to ask ourselves, “What would Jesus do if He were *me*?” — and then **do it!** The answer to this question, and the subsequent action causes us to live with increasing concern for others.

The Apostle John addresses this from a somewhat different angle: *“Also we have come to **know and trust** the love that God has for us. God is love; and those who **remain in this love** remain united with God, and God remains united with them. Here is how love has been brought to maturity with us: **as the Messiah is, so are we in the world. This gives us confidence for the Day of Judgment**”* (1 John 4:16,17).

From a Hebraic perspective, love is evidenced through our actions of obedience, our *response* to the needs He wants to meet through us. Our Father expects us to show up at the Judgment Throne with confidence. And how is this confidence developed? We live as if Jesus were us. Sound impossible? Not when our trusting reliance is in the indwelling Holy Spirit.

John speaks to this truth when he confirms how we can know in our hearts that we belong to the Father: *“Those who **obey his commands** live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the **Spirit he gave us**”* (1 John 3:24). The ongoing filling of the Holy Spirit makes the whole transformation in the character of Jesus possible. Believe it!

Jesus again gives us an example of practical application of our interpersonal responsibility. He knows we tend to hang around those who are “like us”, whether by blood relation or socio-economic status. But He calls for us to do the “super”-natural — to reach out to those who cannot repay our kindness.

*Then Jesus said to his host, ‘When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they **may invite you back** and so you will be repaid.*

But when you give a banquet, invite

*the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you **will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous**”* (Luke 14:12-14).

Wouldn't you prefer to receive the gracious acknowledgement of our Lord rather than the shallow thanks of peers on earth?

How we represent Jesus to the world around us isn't dependent on how frequently you quote Bible verses. Our Master calls us to extend such deep, loving concern for others that they will experience Jesus *through us*.

A Little Background

When I, Mike, first became a follower of Jesus, I was on active duty in the Navy. I'd been raised in a very religious family that was dedicated to their denomination and its creed. But not until I was 31 did I become a follower of Jesus after reading through the Bible twice and crying out to Him for forgiveness. Following my conversion I wanted nothing to do with religious systems. I longed to live for Jesus with the same singleminded wholeheartedness as His first followers did.

I prayed that God would show me other men aboard our ship who were equally committed. In response to my plea He brought me three other men whose love and devotion to Jesus paralleled my own. Two of these men walked in the kind of spiritual maturity that inspired my own growth in obedient trust.

We didn't recognize it then but we brothers exercised a very Hebraic pattern in our walk together:

We would pray and search the Scriptures for guidance for the situa-

tions and problems we encountered. Whatever the Holy Spirit showed us we would live by, no matter what the cost. Our one desire was to lift up Jesus and not divide Him in any way.

It seemed that our Lord always honored our unanimity of agreement by doing the miraculous all around us. We experienced divine healings and witnessed demonic deliverance. If we read it in the Scriptures, we trusted it was still true for us today.

It was the miraculous power of God's mighty intervention time and again that caused many of the men on that ship to put their trust in Jesus. The Apostle Paul was correct in his counsel *"that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power"* (1 Corinthians 2:5). Lives in Jesus were being impacted and changed!

In time the Navy sent two chaplains on board, each with different creedal persuasions. It wasn't long until they caused a lot of tension among the brothers. We felt as though these two men were more interested that we follow their competing creedal positions than that we follow Jesus.

I was chosen by the brothers to take our concern up with them.

"I've been asked to tell you both that we don't want you two teaching us anymore. We've grown in the number of believers you see on this ship by *never dividing Jesus*. You two have done nothing but bring division!"

"But we are the chaplains!" they replied.

"Well, you can chaplain whoever you want, but you won't 'chaplain' us."

The two chaplains were convicted by the Spirit of their own narrow self-inter-

est. They went to the Captain of the ship for permission to leave the ship and spend several days together seeking God. When they returned we encountered two men who followed Jesus. With their creedal division gone, God really started to open the hearts of the men on the ship.

I was given a prophetic appointment by the chaplains: to be the watchman, or sheep dog of the brotherhood. I was to search out the strays and warn the brothers who were wandering from the faith.

The basis for my call was Ezekiel 33:2-9:

*"Son of man, **speak to your countrymen** and say to them: 'When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land **choose one of their men and make him their watchman**, and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to **warn the people**, then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head...*

*"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so **hear the word I speak and give them warning from me**. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to **dissuade him from his ways**, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do **warn the wicked man to turn from his ways** and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.*

Those who recognize evil in their midst yet don't sound the alarm have shipwrecked their responsibility to their "spiritual countrymen".

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

(1 Corinthians 12:26)

The prophetic appointment I first received aboard that ship has led me and Sue down paths of ministry we would never have considered when we first put our trust in Jesus. We found ourselves increasingly conscious of our responsibility to others in the Body.

As those of you who have read our writings have come to realize,

The early Church clearly understood their mutual responsibility to each other. They not only upheld communal righteousness by helping each other remain repentant; they also bore the sufferings and burdens and needs of each other.

God's particular "watchman" call for me has caused Sue and me to see the ***interdependence*** of the Body of Christ and ***our interpersonal responsibilities within it*** in ways that demand more than most Christians we encounter are concerned with.

It's a sad testimony that so many who consider themselves "Christian" experience such little sense of connectedness in their relational responsibility to each other. Even the simple arena of hospitality that is commanded to the children of God is almost non-existent. (See Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:2, 5:10; Hebrews 13:2; Titus 1:8; and 1 Peter 4:9 to evaluate your *own* level of responsibility in regard to hospitality.)

As we've talked with churchgoers over the years, it seems that fewer than 3 out of 100 are invited into their fellow churchgoers' homes. They may rub elbows at potlucks or gatherings in the "fellowship hall", but few get to really

know each other as spiritual family in the warm intimacy of their homes.

As we were writing this Lifebyte, the latest **Voice of the Martyrs** newsletter arrived. In the editorial entitled, "*Open Your Tablecloth*", director Tom White writes:

My wife Ofelia is from Costa Rica, where the kitchen is a meeting place for many who drop by for prayer and tortillas or at least for coffee. The gospel is exploding in Latin America, Africa, Asia, among the neighbors. In Philip Jenkins' book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming Global Christianity*, he describes this explosion and how North America is getting left behind. Do Christians in America think that we do not need each other anymore? Someone once said, "Our greatest need is that we have no need."

[From Sue and me: We know that your own spiritual walk would grow tremendously if you were part of the Voice of the Martyrs mailing list. You may contact them at (800) 337-0303 or e-mail them at <thevoice@vom-usa.org>]

"If one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, doesn't he leave the other 99 in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it?"

(Luke 15:4)

The passage about the lost sheep had special meaning for me in my ministry aboard the Navy ship. With the two chaplains living in unity of spirit, God prospered our fellowship. From four of us in the beginning, we grew to over 125 followers of Jesus in under a year. Each of us could write books about our expe-

riences because we each had witnessed the miraculous hand of our Father at work all around us. Especially, we experienced *the level of fellowship in which the earliest followers of Jesus walked*.

A Seven-Eleven Opportunity

I got out of the Navy about 18 months after my conversion. In the years that followed we moved several times, and I found myself attending “civilian” congregations. I often felt lost and frustrated. The one thing that was evident to me is that the people neither needed nor depended on each other as family in Jesus. They were like eggs in a Sunday morning egg carton. Aboard that ship, we brothers had been “scrambled eggs”, interacting with each other 24/7.

When we studied the Word of God aboard the ship, it was as if our lives depended on how we applied it. Now, in Bible studies and Sunday school classes, it was more of an intellectual exercise of people’s minds.

In one congregation I met a man from a Greek Orthodox background who attended this evangelical church because of his wife. He wasn’t comfortable sitting in Sunday school classes because he was intimidated by the intellectualism and personal showboating of academic prowess.

Recognizing his uneasiness, one morning I invited him to walk with me to the nearby Seven-Eleven for a cup of coffee while the class was in session.

He had a lot of questions, and as we walked we discussed them. This grew to a wonderful friendship between our families. We were often in each other’s homes. And since both of us liked fishing, we were able to continue our conversations about applying God’s truth to

our daily lives even along the river!

Coffee In The Parking Lot

After a move to another state, we attended a congregation where God REALLY tested our perseverance. Skipping most of the details, suffice it to say that our spirits grieved in this congregation. The focus was intellectual, and the membership called themselves “*the frozen chosen*.” There was no love or caring in evidence, and Bible knowledge seemed to be their idol.

We pleaded with our Lord to let us leave, but He directed us through a number of means to stay for five years. He purposed for us to role model loving one another, to witness to them of His loving power through personal testimony of answered prayer, and to warn them of their callousness.

During the Sunday school hour a sizeable group of men would hang out in the parking lot to smoke. I started taking cups of coffee out to them. Over time I had a wonderful chance getting to know each one of them. I found that many had a deep love for the Lord that wasn’t showy, but it was genuine.

Why were they outside? Each one of them had a wife who considered herself more spiritual than her husband. The women often compared their husbands to the pastor and to the Sunday school teachers — and the husbands fell short in the arena of spiritual depth in their wives’ eyes.

We all became good friends, and I found more of the character of Jesus in these men than I did in any of the men to whom their wives compared them.

In time I was brought before the leaders of the congregation because some of the women convinced them that what I

was doing was wrong. During my meeting with the elders, I appealed to them based upon their biblical responsibilities: God hadn't called them to run religious systems and programs, but to care for *all* the sheep under their care.

One of the elders was convicted and joined me in delivering coffee and spending time with the guys in the parking lot. His whole attitude changed, and he became more loving and attentive to all under his care. A leader with a servant heart —what a joyous transformation!

Odd-man Out Situations

Each day you encounter people who feel on the outside of whatever is considered “in”. Yet, it's what you *do* about them that manifests the character of Christ in you. We encourage you to take time to go through the Newer Testament and the Book of Proverbs to cite all the passages of Scripture that pertain to your ***interpersonal responsibility*** to another human being.

If you begin to walk out even some of these, then the world will see Jesus manifested through you. In your pilgrimage to salvation it's imperative that you yield to the Spirit to become increasingly more like Jesus before you see Him face-to-face! *Remember 1 John 4:16,17, and be like Jesus in the world.*

Fathers and Grandfathers

When a woman gives birth, it's a truly joyous occasion. But this event also brings about ***a time of relational displacement for many fathers and grandfathers.*** Many men feel left out at this time of great joy for the rest of the family.

In some European cultures, some fathers take a lover to fill in for his wife's

consuming focus on their children. From our years at the retreat center, you'd be amazed how many men feel so isolated after a baby is born.

Families need to talk through these situations. Any time someone or something new such as a baby or a move occurs, open discussion is needed so that everyone's heart can be expressed. [See our book, ***Growing Relationships Through Confrontation***, a free download at our website.]

Adopted Children, Children of Divorce, Children Conceived Out of Wedlock

Individuals who fall under any of these categories can go on for years never feeling like they *belong*. They perceive others as being “in” and themselves as the outsider. Many find it difficult to belong to others, something psychologists call “*attachment disorder*.” You may often find these people busy in church activities, especially as ring leaders because they may substitute the pursuit of recognition for relational intimacy.

It takes special awareness by those who are close to these individuals. But more importantly they need the genuine healing that ONLY Jesus can give in order for them to experience intimate belonging.

Women Who Miscarry, Women With Handicapped Children

A woman who miscarries may be plagued by self-accusation (“What did I do that brought this about?”); Or they may be haunted by guilt (“I wasn't grateful to God for this unplanned baby.”). Or they may suffer depression (“How can I get over this loss, and am I willing to

chance this again?”). We’ve encountered a number of women who have undergone these and other inner agitations following their loss.

Many women who bear a handicapped child, on the other hand, almost feel as if they must apologize to the world for not bearing a perfect baby. She may find herself bringing up her child’s particular circumstance to forestall others bringing it up or avoiding it. However, those references can sear the child with a deep sense of imperfection or unwantedness.

Every baby born is alive because God enabled the conception and brought him or her to birth. It is He Who opens and closes wombs for His divine purposes. Each baby born has the potential to walk in His divine plan, **“for you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb”** (Psalm 139:13).

There is no “handicap” in a child, but an opportunity for God’s sovereign purpose to be realized. A mother must never apologize for the special child God has given!

Followers of Jesus Amid the Churched

We continue to receive testimonies from many who go through prolonged periods of isolation when they are determined to follow our Lord no matter what the cost. Often He leads His devoted child away from the half-hearted in order to prepare them for new service or mission. But it is a doubly painful experience because:

1. They no longer throng with crowds in the religious establishment.
2. They face attacks by those who vigorously uphold the religious establishment.

We want to encourage you that one way or another, EVERYONE who yearns to truly follow in the steps of Jesus must experience the classroom of being alone with Him. In a ‘groupie’ religious culture, being alone can be a very difficult adjustment.

But know this: There is no other way to experience the depth of a loving relationship with Jesus. The attacks by others are designed by Him to drive you closer, and to be more dependent on your Beloved with Whom you will be spending eternity.

Can you be alone and at peace in your own thoughts, and in your relationship with your Lord? Or, do you constantly need music, tapes, or group meetings to bolster your sense of spiritual well-being?

People Who Lose Their Hearing

Studies show that people who lose their hearing often experience bouts of paranoia. You also find them talking more and listening less! With out meaning to, those whose hearing is diminishing tend to drive people away from them, which only increases their sense of isolation.

If you are hard of hearing and find yourself talking *at* people more than talking *with* them, you owe it to others to explore ways to regain as much hearing as you can. You’re missing out on vital insights that others could be sharing with you!

If you are close to someone who suffers hearing loss, encourage them to do what they can to improve their ability to hear. [Again, see our book, ***Growing Relationships Through Confrontation***, a free download, to help you support the dignity of this person during your confrontation conversations.]

Being With Someone On Their Cell Phone, or With Someone Who Takes Phone Calls While You Are With Them

We first became aware of a very insulting situation during our retreat center days. People would complain that when they had an appointment with their clergy, he would accept phone calls while they were sitting with him in his office. Not only was having to wait while he talked away insulting, but often they were forced to overhear privileged information.

As a result of this awareness, we were among the first to get an answering unit and cordless phones. Whenever we had meals or were involved in meaningful conversations, we'd let the answering unit take the call. [We encourage you to do this!] In the early days people were somewhat irate at not being able to talk to a live person.

The person you are with deserves your full attention. You're maligning their dignity when you allow someone at the other end of a phone to interrupt time with a flesh and blood individual in your presence!

Our reason for getting cordless phones was that when we were on the phone, we could take our conversations away from the earshot of others. Then they could continue talking freely, and our phone conversations could remain confidential.

With the rise in the use of cell phones we see so many people trapped in cars and restaurants while someone else gabs on the phone. It's demeaning to just sit there and have to listen to some one-sided dialogue conducted at full volume. You are no longer a meaningful person, but relegated to the position of a non-

entity.

If you abuse others this way, we encourage you to let your voice mail take a message, or to answer the phone and simply say, "I am with someone right now. Can I call you back?"

Help For Those Left Out

In our first Lifebyte, *To Love and Be Loved*, we included a helpful tool called The Jahari Window. It pictures life situations in which a person needs to **disclose something about themselves**. This is especially true when you are experiencing feelings of being left out and isolated. It's wrong to assume that anyone else realizes the pain or discomfort you are going through. "*Each heart knows its own bitterness*" (Proverbs 14:10a).

Also, those of us who follow Jesus must be on the lookout for those who are suffering needlessly from being left out. In a loving way we must come alongside them to help them through positive and loving concern. In this way we can best put into action the love of Jesus for them.

When you reach out to the isolated, you are treading the pathway of the ministry of Jesus: "*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners*" (Isaiah 61:1). Remember, your loving help and concern is your practical fulfillment of what you are commanded to do in His Name.

Learning In the Lord's Classroom

During times when you're feeling left out and isolated, pay close attention to how our Lord is using this season for

your spiritual development. These times can intensify ***your peace of heart*** and ***your obedient trust*** in ways that no other instrument of God can do.

We live in a world in which we are constantly bombarded to adapt the *ways of the world*. We can become what the Bible calls “double-minded” — cherishing the things of this world more than we love God Himself.

Again, John describes the nature of this double-mindedness: “***For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever***” (1 John 2:16,17).

We who follow Jesus must live *in* the world to fulfill our Lord’s purposes and reveal Him, but we *cannot embrace its values*. If we don’t guard ourselves, we can actually conform to its values to such a point that we actually, and sometimes unknowingly, become our Father’s enemy: “***You adulterous people [loving something more than we do God], don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God***” (James 4:4).

Pursuit of worldly values and things in this world is *not* our Father’s desire for any of His children. As He sets us apart and transforms us as we yield our will to His, He desires to change us into the character of Jesus. This transformation empowers us to fulfill purposes that bring glory to Him.

But this transforming work can only be done as we choose to *draw near* to our Lord. And, sometimes this requires periods of being isolated. James understood that our sinful nature will be confronted as we draw near, and he offers specific counsel to make sure our actions (“hands”) and motives (“hearts”) line up with God’s. “***Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded***” (James 4:8).

Times alone with our Lord are a necessary part of His character development in us. Again, ***are you at peace in your own thoughts, and in your relationship with your Lord?***

If not, get alone with Him for whatever time it takes for Jesus to complete in you the changes He wants to make. It’s His way to deepen your intimacy with Him and to prepare you for His next work to be done through you!