



I sat there, surrounded by people, but I felt so alone.

I remember eating lunch when I was in high school. Students were allowed to eat outside, and people would gather in their social groups. I still remember where each group gathered, the smiles on their faces, and the laughter in their voices. My closest friends, except for one, had a different lunch period than I, so I ate alone if the one friend was absent, and I remember the ache of loneliness.

I often wondered as I sat there eating my lunch alone, did anyone notice? Did anyone care?

Do you carry a memory of loneliness with you? Is it the result of being left out of a group? Was it a crisis or trauma that you faced without anyone by your side or losing someone you love? Was it an illness that kept you isolated? Were you far away from home? Possibly you have been surrounded by people, and no one notices you, and you think no one cares.

It doesn't matter who we are or what stage of life we're in; everyone will experience loneliness at one time or another.

There is a young woman in the Bible named Hagar who was lonely. We find her in the book of Genesis. Abraham was married to Sarah, and Hagar was her maidservant. Hagar was probably a young girl when she moved into the role. Sarah was barren, and as custom allowed, she suggested that Abraham sleep with Hagar so Sarah could have children through her. Abraham slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. Instead of solving Sarah's problem, dysfunction and tension grew between her and Hagar, and because of Sarah's harsh treatment, Hagar ran away into the wilderness. (Genesis 16:1-6)

A desperate situation left Hagar all alone as desperate situations often do. But that's when God made his presence a certainty to her. The angel of the Lord came to Hagar and comforted her with the truth that God was there. God heard her cries and saw her tears. He was sensitive to her suffering, and He cared. Hagar may have felt lonely, but she was never



alone.

I wish I could go back and tell my high school self, sitting alone at lunch, that God was with me and cared about me. Hagar learned this truth by living it herself. Our loneliest times can be opportunities to experience God's care like never before. They can allow us to know him better and love him more. Hagar developed a new understanding of God, and she gained a fresh vision of the One who had his eyes on her. She used a new name for God - El Roi, meaning "the God who sees me." The intensity of her loneliness led to an intense awareness of God's tender presence.

When you are alone, perhaps you can see your solitude as an opportunity to gain a new awareness of God's presence.

If you are lonely, remember the "One who sees" is with you. May you find El Roi's tender comfort, companionship, and care.

"She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." Genesis 16:13

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