

## ALONE

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## i n a c r o w d



By Rev. Robert Walter

*"I am really sorry for such a long time in silence. Since July I have had to face many challenges in my work and family. In times like that I stay in silence. But now I'm back... until the next cave time."*

The above note arrived yesterday in an e-mail from a pastor friend in Brazil. It made me smile because it's so typical of our tendency to withdraw when times are tough. It also made me smile because it wasn't so long ago that I was having my own "cave time."

We're surrounded by people but we're alone in the crowd. We're marooned among the masses. People, people everywhere but not a soul in synch.

As society has become increasingly fragmented by various factors such as mobility and divorce, we

have moved from a culture of connected community to what Cornel West calls a "hotel society." In his book, *"Equipping the Saints,"* author Michael J. Christiansen notes, "In such a society, one may live in the company of others,

but the connections are tenaciously superficial and unrelentingly transitory."

### Alone with God—Not a Good Thing?

It is easy to over-spiritualize—to fall into the trap of

thinking that since we have such a strong relationship with God we don't need people as others might. If that's the case, take another look at the opening chapters of Genesis. At intervals in the creation account we read, "And God saw that it was good." Like a painter stepping back from the canvas to survey his work, God assesses His handiwork. Again and again we hear the refrain, "It was good; it was good."

The pattern is broken twice in the narrative of chapters one and two. The first break comes after God created Adam. In assessing the situation, the Creator notes it is not good. Interesting... The sharks are good, the buzzards are good and the hyenas are good. But Adam is not? Author Jon Ortberg teases, "Is it because God likes women better?"

It is stunning to imagine that God would label the pinnacle of His creation even a shade less than good. Of course, when we read the explanation it makes sense. "It is not good for the man to be alone." But does this answer make sense, or does it just raise more questions? Doesn't Adam have a relationship with God? How can he be alone? And since this occurs before the Fall, isn't it a perfect relationship?

Yes, Adam had perfect fellowship with God, but apparently it's not enough. From God's perspective, Adam is alone. The solution is to make another human being—Eve. In providing for human relationship, God demonstrates that He doesn't presume to take the place of other people. We are made for an intimate relationship with God, but that relationship does not



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exempt us from the need for authentic relationships with others.

It is tempting to think that the more mature we are as spiritual leaders, the less we need other people. We tend to believe, “The more you lean on Jesus, the less you need to lean on others.” But if Adam still needed human relationships in a perfect world, how much more do we who live in a world racked by sin? No matter how mature we are in Christ, we never outgrow our need for others.

The second break in the pattern of God’s consistently good appraisals comes after He made community possible. After God has finished making a helper for

Adam, He stepped back one last time to survey all He has made. It is only then that He made His pronouncement, “*and it was very good.*”<sup>1</sup> The creation of community elevates His assessment from “not good” to “very good.”

### The Alone Ranger

The Lone Ranger is a hero—he swoops in at the moment of need and saves the day. But the “Alone” Ranger is in jeopardy.



### It's not good to be alone.

As Bonhoeffer notes, “Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more

destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation.”<sup>2</sup>

It’s not good to be alone.<sup>3</sup>

Satan waited until Jesus was alone in the wilderness to tempt Him. Jesus was just beginning His ministry. And though Satan was not successful, it is clear that he was not going to quit. The encounter ends ominously with the note, “*When Satan finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*”<sup>4</sup>

And there could not have been a more opportune time to tempt Jesus than at the end of His ministry—on the eve of His greatest sacrifice. So as He goes to Gethsemane with His disciples, Jesus invites three of them stay with Him.<sup>5</sup> Failure at this stage can’t be risked, so Jesus doesn’t dare be alone.

### Supporting Cast

Jesus doesn’t have the same level of intimacy in every

relationship. There are the 120, the 70, the 12, the three, and the one beloved disciple, John, to whom He entrusts his mother. Opening our heart to others doesn’t mean we will open our heart to everyone in the same way. There may be only one beloved—one person we can trust with what is precious to us. But that is the beginning of authentic community.

And the best place to begin the development of authentic community is right at home. In an especially busy period of ministry, my wife said to me, “I’m tired of getting leftovers. You give your best to everyone else but have nothing left for me.” My wife rarely complains but when she does, she has reason to. I was neglecting her, and she wasn’t the only one that suffered because of it—I did too. We schedule time with others; why not do the same with our spouse and children?

Being intentional about building a healthy relationship with our spouse is just the beginning. We also benefit from developing a healthy network with a variety of other people. We may not be blessed to have all of these types of relationships, but any of the following are a huge improvement over going it alone. They are an asset for anyone who has spent too much time in a cave.

- **A Rib**—Adam needed a helper. We all do. That person may be a spouse or a team-mate, or it may be another person who not only stands by your side but pitches in.
- **A Mirror**—King David was deep in denial about his outrageous behavior, so God sent Nathan so David could see himself as he really was. We all need a truth-teller who will help us see things we don’t want to look at but desperately need to see. Coy was my mirror. He helped me see things that I needed to see—both good and bad.
- **A Voice**—When Saul was first converted, the leaders of the church in Jerusalem didn’t believe he was really a disciple. Barnabas was his advocate. He told the apostles how Saul had met the Lord and was now preaching the gospel he had once tried to destroy. What a blessing to have an advocate. Yet even more important than having an advocate on earth, we need a voice speaking on our behalf in Heaven. We need someone to advocate for us through prayer. On a hill overlooking the battlefield, Moses lifted his hands in prayer for Joshua as he battled the army of the Amalekites. As long as Moses’ hands were raised,

Joshua prevailed.<sup>6</sup> Ten years ago I intentionally developed a team of intercessors. Without their prayers I probably would have quit the ministry two years later when I found myself in the midst of one of the most intense spiritual conflicts of my life—a time in which I was emotionally beaten and bruised.

- **An Ear**—David found a friend in a most unlikely person—Jonathan, the son of David’s enemy, Saul. We all need someone who will listen to our heart and fight for our heart. We need someone we can share our secrets with. Friends may indeed betray us, but the cost of isolating yourself may be the loss of your marriage or your ministry. Friends aren’t like mushrooms—they don’t grow overnight. But they are worth cultivating even if it takes time. And if friends are in short supply and you need someone to listen, a professional counselor or coach can be a welcome substitute for a friend.

You may never have all of these relationships. I have never had a relationship with a mentor—a model for ministry—even though I prayed for one for years. But I found that as I pursued the development of a supporting cast, God provided people in these other roles that have helped me be more whole and effective.



## Out of Balance

When I talk with leaders, I ask them to sort their most time-consuming relationships into three columns: those that energize them, those that drain them, and those that leave them neither here nor there.

I first did this informal survey myself at a time when I was burned out on ministry and ready to quit. I discovered what many busy ministers discover—I was way out of balance. The number of relationships with people that drained me far exceeded the number of relationships with people that replenished me. No wonder I was worn out.

With that discovery I set out to balance my relational chart. I recruited more prayer intercessors—those who

would be a voice for me in heaven. I scheduled more time with people who were healthy—my wife, certain friends, and a spiritual mother. This, and a renewed focus on my time with my best friend, Jesus, helped me get back on my feet again. Subsequently it helped me get the church back on course again, too.

You can languish alone, or you can build your relational web. If you choose to establish authentic relationships, the hardest part may be coming out of the cave. Sure, it’s risky to open your heart, but it’s more risky to keep it closed—you could lose your marriage, your ministry, your life.

Philip Zimbardo, a Stanford University Professor and a respected authority on

psychology, wrote, “I know of no more potent killer than isolation. There is no more destructive influence on physical and mental health than the isolation of you from me and us from them. It has been shown to be a central agent in the etiology of depression, paranoia, schizophrenia, rape, suicide, mass murder and a wide variety of disease states.”<sup>7</sup>

Do yourself a favor, come out of the cave and stay out.



*Robert Walter is the training director for LeaderSource, a ministry that helps experienced leaders raise up emerging leaders (leadersource.org). He’s been married to Vilia for 30 years and is part of the Alliance of Renewal (ARC) leadership team (arcusa.org).*



Robert Walter

1. Genesis 1:31
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 78
3. I’m using this expression the way God does when he looks at Adam on the sixth day. There are certainly times when we profit from being alone just as Jesus did when he went off to be alone with the Father.
4. Luke 4:13
5. Matthew 26:37-38
6. Exodus 17:8-16
7. Quoted in *Strengthening Your Grip* by Charles Swindoll (page 29)

*(This article was originally published as a Lutheran Renewal “Especially for Pastors” newsletter.)*



# "Power...Receive It!"

(Acts 1:8)

## Holy Spirit Conference

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"The Power of a Christlike Life"  
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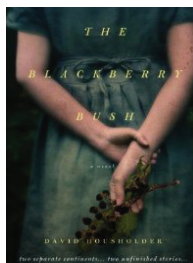
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## The Blackberry Bush by Rev. David Housholder



Two babies, Kati and Josh, are born on opposite sides of the world at the very moment the Berlin Wall falls. You'd think such a potent freedom metaphor would become the soundtrack for their lives, but nothing could be further from the truth. Two separate continents...two unfinished stories...two connected destinies.

David Housholder is an international conference speaker, a California beach church pastor, an avid philosophical-spiritual influencer, surfer, and friend of Lutheran Renewal. Go to Amazon, Borders, or Walmart.

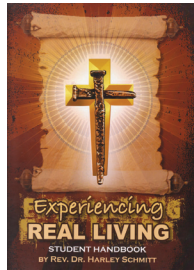
## Forgiven by Rev. Sheilah Fletch

After leaving prison, Max Carron seeks the Judge who convicted him. He is convinced that Sicilian connections and bribery influenced the sentence. M.K. McDonald is the CEO of Kayleen Enterprises, but now a dark cloud has appeared. Inexplicably and violently, M.K.'s life collides with Carron's. Is he an answer to her prayer, or the enemy masquerading as an angel of light?

Sheilah Fletch is a former veterinarian and ordained pastor from Ontario. Her current ministry focus is children at risk throughout the world. She has been a friend of Lutheran Renewal for many years. Find her book at Amazon or Borders.



## Real Living by Dr. Harley Schmitt

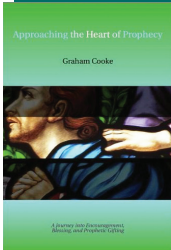


This book includes 12 lessons on topics including Creation, Sin, Gifts of the Spirit, and Baptism, to name just a few. It is designed with a DVD and visual aids and uses the Inductive Method of teaching. The course is great for small groups, house churches, confirmation and adult instruction with Teacher and Student manuals available. To order: [h.schmitt@redeemer.fridley.org](mailto:h.schmitt@redeemer.fridley.org) or [www.LutheranRenewal.org](http://www.LutheranRenewal.org).

Harley Schmitt has been in pastoral ministry for over 45 years, the last 14 at Redeemer Luth. in Fridley, MN, serving as a teacher and counselor. Harley is a longtime friend of Lutheran Renewal and served on its Board for many years.

## Home Groups on the Prophetic

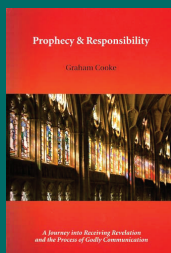
(Using the first three books of Graham Cooke's prophetic series.)



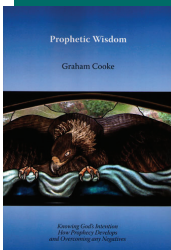
September 2011-January 2012  
February-May 2012

You may attend one or both of the sessions.

Recipe using Cooke's Books:  
discussion of material,  
praying prophetically for each other,  
supporting each other. Taste and See!



We need host homes and leaders.  
Interested: [ilrc@aol.com](mailto:ilrc@aol.com).



Details on groups and locations will be posted this summer. Sign up for Arise! e-letter or check the website: [LutheranRenewal.org](http://LutheranRenewal.org).

We had over 100 women who participated this year.

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