

Week 18 Practice

Most of us believe that our loneliness is a sign of our faultiness, so we hide it and our truest self deep down inside of us, and we ask other people to make us feel better. It is not until we have embraced our truest, worthiest self that we begin to realize that some of our loneliness is simply a natural artifact of being alive. Then, we are free to connect within it, rather than trying to connect to get rid of it.

If you are human, you are probably putting too much pressure on at least one of your relationships to take away your loneliness. This week, we will focus on beginning to embrace our people by embracing our loneliness first. Ultimately, we can disrupt the cycle of disappointment and blame in our relationships by sharing our lonely experiences. Grab a piece of paper, a pencil, and some quiet space.

Then:

- 1. In writing or with pictures, identify your earliest memory of feeling lonely. With your family, in a classroom, on the playground, on an operating table. Whatever it may be for you.*
- 2. Identify your most lonely memory of childhood. A time when you felt completely on your own. Perhaps even abandoned, discarded, neglected.*
- 3. Identify a time more recently, in adulthood, when you felt similar feelings of loneliness and blamed it on someone close to you. What did you say? What did you attribute your loneliness to?*
- 4. Write a letter of confession to that person. Begin the letter something like this: "Dear [Name], I blame you for my loneliness, but the truth is, I felt lonely long before you came into my life, so you can't be responsible for all of it." Then go on to share your reflection from #1 and #2.*

If this feels especially difficult for you to do right now, whether because it feels too vulnerable or you don't trust the person to whom you are writing to respond constructively, that's okay. Write the letter, but don't send it. In the coming weeks, we are going to be working through some of the factors that make this practice difficult. Perhaps you will be ready to send the letter in the future. These things take time, and a different amount of time for every person.

If you find this exercise impossible and you are quickly realizing you are not ready yet for the months of loving, that's okay, too. Press pause on this year, return to Week 1, and cycle through the months of listening once again. As you progress through the listening exercises again, when you feel ready to engage in *this* exercise, you will know you're ready for the months of loving.