

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart,
your loving ways—
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.
And if you ever doubt yourself, remember us, who love you
well—

We know all the gifts you bring into the world each day.
So thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart,
your loving ways,
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.

—by Judy Fjell and Lisa Bregger

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent, and to come to the group one last time and say good-bye if I need to quit
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people’s stories
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn

Covenant Groups

Independence

versus

Loneliness



Independence *versus* Loneliness

Chalice Lighting

A friend is one that knows you as you are, understands where you have been, accepts what you have become, and still, gently allows you to grow.

—William Shakespeare

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings

Language . . . has created the word “loneliness” to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word “solitude” to express the glory of being alone.

—Paul Tillich

A great step toward independence is a good-humored stomach.

—Seneca (ca. 4 BCE–65 CE)

We sense that there can be no true communion between human beings until they have in fact become beings: for to be able to give oneself one must have taken possession of oneself in that painful solitude outside of which nothing belongs to us and we have nothing to give. . . . And one might even say that I begin to communicate with others as soon as I begin to communicate with myself.

—Louis Lavelle

Happiness is not a matter of intensity, but of balance, order, rhythm and harmony.

—Thomas Merton

The basic need of the creator is independence. The reasoning mind cannot work under any form of compulsion. It cannot be curbed, sacrificed or subordinated to any consideration whatsoever. It demands total independence in function and in motive.

—Ayn Rand

There is no pleasure to me without communication: there is not so much as a sprightly thought comes into my mind that it does not grieve me to have produced alone, and that I have no one to tell it to.

—Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533–1592)

To dare to live alone is the rarest courage; since there are many who had rather meet their bitterest enemy in the field, than their own hearts in their closet.

—Charles Caleb Colton (1780–1832)

Always do what you want, and say what you feel, because those whose mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind.

—Dr. Suess

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening

Round 1: What two or three words come to mind when you think of “independence”? What two or three words come to mind when you think of “loneliness”? How might they be related?

Round 2: Where in your life do you most value your independence, and where do you find the most fulfillment in connection with others?

Round 3: What did you learn from the homework or this session that surprised you? Is there anything, as a result, that you've decided to change in your life?

Closing Words

Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

—Viktor Frankl

Closing Song

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business

Homework for the next meeting.

Homework: Independence versus Loneliness

We celebrate independence in this country; we have a holiday dedicated to our nation's independence . . . our freedom. So what about our personal freedoms? How do we attain and maintain the freedom to be self-governing and sovereign (a nation of one), the freedom to grow, to express ourselves, and to find inner peace? Why does the idea of personal independence—which has a ring of such greatness!—often feel tainted with a sense that it will lead to sadness, isolation, and loneliness?

I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will.

—Charlotte Bronte

Unlike a drop of water which loses its identity when it joins the ocean, man does not lose his being in the society in which he lives. Man's life is independent. He is born not for the development of the society alone, but for the development of his self.

—B. R. Ambedkar

Loneliness adds beauty to life. It puts a special burn on sunsets and makes night air smell better.

—Henry Rollins

It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Self-love, self-knowing, and gentleness toward self are beneficial keys to the process. After all, loneliness doesn't really have all that much to do with being alone; it's more about inner perspective. One can be in a community, in a social group or in a marriage, and feel intense loneliness and feelings of being misunderstood. No one can be as great a friend, partner, lover, and spiritual guide to us as our essential, core, divine and loving self.

—femmefire

Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose.

—Kris Kristofferson

If a man does not keep pace with his companion, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.

—Henry David Thoreau

Questions to Ponder

Take the "Independence versus Loneliness Quiz":

- When you make a major decision, do you make your own decision, disregarding other people's opinions?
- Do you find yourself doing things that you'd rather not be doing to avoid being alone?
- Do you ever feel empty and alone even when you're surrounded by people?
- Do you feel rejuvenated after time spent alone?

Life: it's about personal choices.

Until a person can say deeply and honestly, "I am what I am today because of the choices I made yesterday," that person cannot say, "I choose otherwise."

—Stephen R. Covey

- When/where in your life are you independent?
- How does your independence benefit you? How does it benefit those around you?
- Is humor a necessary ingredient in differentiating between loneliness and solitude/independence?
- Would you like more or less independence in your life? From whom or what?
- Does being independent sometimes mean being unwilling to compromise? When have you stood firm for your beliefs even if significant others disagreed or didn't understand?

- What choices have you made that left you feeling lonely? Looking back, do you stand by those choices?
- What things do you do alone to support your well-being and general humanity? How does this enhance you being able to participate in and give back to your community?

Leader's Guide: Independence versus Loneliness

We celebrate independence in this country; we have a holiday dedicated to our nation's independence . . . our freedom. So what about our personal freedoms? How do we attain and maintain the freedom to be self-governing and sovereign (a nation of one), the freedom to grow, to express ourselves, and to find inner peace? Why does the idea of personal independence—which has a ring of such greatness!—often feel tainted with a sense that it will lead to sadness, isolation, and loneliness?

Chalice Lighting (2 min)

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin as you light the chalice.

A friend is one that knows you as you are, understands where you have been, accepts what you have become, and still, gently allows you to grow.

—William Shakespeare

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows (10 min)

Ask group members to check in, telling in one or two sentences how they are doing this week. Share information about absent members.

Silence (3 min)

Start with the following words: “Get comfortable in your seat. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath in, and then a deep breath out. And now just breathe gently.” Then give your group the gift of three minutes of silence. Time it if you would like.

Shared Readings (5 min)

Have each person in turn read from the shared readings found in the bulletin until all the readings are finished.

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (65 min)

Do three rounds of deep sharing and deep listening. Pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure that everyone gets a turn to share.

Round 1 (10 min): What two or three words come to mind when you think of “independence”? What two or three words come to mind when you think of “loneliness”? How might they be related?

Round 2 (40 min): Where in your life do you most value your independence, and where do you find the most fulfillment in connection with others?

Round 3 (15 min): What did you learn from the homework or this session that surprised you? Is there anything, as a result, that you've decided to change in your life?

Closing Words (1 min)

Read or ask someone to read the closing words.

Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

—Viktor Frankl

Closing Song (1 min)

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business (5 min)

Pass out the homework for next time.