

## How Solitude Can Enhance Your Life



By Gayle Crist,  
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All my life, I avoided solitude. It was easy when I was one of 5 kids in a small house...and effortless in a college dorm for 3 years living with several other girls and in grad school living with 2 fellow students.

I had my first taste of living alone in my own apartment at age 23 and slowly began to like it. Granted, I still had a lot of people contact—hanging out with 3 neighbors my age in the same building, working at a busy publishing company, and long-distance dating a man I'd met in grad school. It was a nice balance.

But, then, after my divorce at 41, I experienced loneliness for the first time. Whereas I had very little alone time when my 2 kids were with me, I had too much of it when they were with their dad. Solitude was uncomfortable for me, so I immediately made plans to NOT be alone, by attending singles and hiking groups at least 3 times a week. But I also balanced those outings with time doing solo activities I enjoyed, such as watching movies, reading self-help books, walking in nature, baking, exercising, and phoning old friends.

Of course, I've worked alone from home as a self-employed writer, editor, and coach for 37 years. So I've had a lot of opportunity to get used to solitude.

How about you? Have you had to deal with more isolation and solitude than usual during the pandemic? If you live alone, it's probably been tough at times.

Personally, I've been alone more these last couple months because my partner has been taking care of his dad who's recovering from chemotherapy side effects. I thought it would be challenging, but it hasn't because I've been using my alone time to do things that move me closer to my goals and the people in my life and/or provide enjoyment and intellectual stimulation. Here are some examples. I've been:

- Reading more novels than ever before and enjoying Netflix/Amazon TV series and films
- Walking once a week with each of my 2 best friends, who are now more available than they were pre-pandemic

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- Spending lots more time in nature with my daughter, partner, or friends
- Having fun doing crossword puzzles again after a long hiatus from that hobby
- Writing more often in my gratitude journal
- Spending more time in my garden
- Doing volunteer work for 3 organizations
- Reading books with my partner's grandson on FaceTime to prevent him from being bored after finishing his virtual second-grade classes and assignments
- Cooking and baking more from scratch than ever before

What do you like to do with your alone time? And are you enjoying your solitude or is it hard for you to adapt to this "new normal" of having more time on your hands without other people around?

If you're struggling a bit, I have a suggestion: **think of your alone time as personal growth time.** I'm sure you've discovered over the years that life challenges (such as a pandemic) present the best opportunities for you to grow personally, psychologically, emotionally, and/or spiritually. This has definitely been the case for me since the lockdown started in March.

I've found that I have more time for prayer, reading spiritual texts and personal growth books, contemplation, and listening to my inner voice (which some may think of as Divine guidance). Alone time is often quiet time, which makes it easier to hear this voice—unless, of course, you are uncomfortable with quiet and tend to fill it with sound from your TV, radio, CD/DVD player, or smartphone. This is a habit many of us have—but it can be broken.

Give it a try! Promise yourself you'll build some quiet time into each day over the next 2 weeks...and see what happens.

If your experience is like mine, in the quiet, you will:

- **Notice more of what's happening around you.** For example, I find that, when I slow down and get quiet, I'm more aware of sensual pleasures such as the sounds of birdsong and wind rustling, the sights of sun streaming through my window and fall leaf "storms" when the leaves swirl down from the trees, and the taste of each morsel of food I eat.
- **Be able to think more clearly** as you write in a journal or compile your gratitude list; I definitely have more insights, access deeper truths, and make more interesting discoveries about myself when I create a quiet environment for these activities.
- **Feel calmer and more relaxed** than when you're surrounded by noise, distractions, and activity. When I retreat from the busyness and hectic pace of daily life for a little while, I notice that I'm breathing more evenly and feeling stress melt away.
- **Realize that you can be stronger and more centered** as you fear solitude less and embrace it more. When you're okay—and even happy—being alone and enjoying your own company (what I like to call "making my own fun"), you're showing that you're self-confident and self-loving.

This self-confidence and self-love will enhance every aspect of your life—both at home and at work—because you'll have a better grasp of who you are and what your purpose is. That's a wonderful life!

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