**Spiritual Loneliness**

**We are Christians.** We go to church, attend Sunday school, sing songs, pray, and we may even read the Bible on a regular basis. We try to forgive others, to let people go ahead of us at stop signs, to teach our children to share and not to hit. We often give generously, will donate canned goods and coats to those who need them, and will even send our youth on a mission trip. We believe that Jesus Christ died for our sins. We are Christians.

But some of us feel like something is missing.

We pray, but are not sure if we’re doing it correctly, or if God is really listening. We read scripture, but it seems ancient and doesn’t speak into our lives. We want to know God’s plan for our lives but don’t know how to find it. We worship but walk out of the sanctuary and by Monday morning the hymns are no longer in our heads and we’ve forgotten the point of the sermon. It’s not just a feeling, but it’s our spirit, our soul, that tells us there is something more, if only we could figure out what it is.

For many, the Christian life is very busy with activity and commitments. But our lives are not transformed, our souls are not inspired, and we can’t seem to find peace. Dallas Willard points out the disparity between “hoping for life expressed in Jesus” and the “actual day-to-day behavior, inner life, and social presence of most of those who now profess adherence to him.” Think of Christmas carols. “Joy to the World! The Lord is come!” They convey so much excitement, anticipation, and hope for a new life, a transformed world in Christ. But how long does that hope last us throughout the year? Where is the promised new life?

In fact, many of us are what could be described as *spiritually lonely*. We go to church with our friends or family, we sit in a room full of hundreds of people singing and praying together. Though we may connect with others on a social or familial level and though we may worship right next to someone, we rarely connect to them on an authentic level.

**The thing that is missing in so many of our faith lives is spiritually authentic community.** Real community, beyond our immediate family, where we know someone and they know us. A place where we can drop our masks and finally be real—not be judged or fixed. A place where our faith is what unites and not the fact that we work at the same place or that our kids go to the same school. Too many of us don’t have people who will walk with us in our pursuit to follow Jesus. We are rarely in groups of people we trust in which we can discuss questions of faith and God, where we can listen and be listened to, where we can pray for and be prayed for. We are rarely with people who will remind us of where we want to go spiritually and who can also help us get there. We are rarely with people in whom we can see Christ and who can help us encounter Christ in ourselves.

Jesus said, “When two or more are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” And that’s when being Christian begins to be more than just another thing to do. When Jesus Christ—God incarnate who was killed and then defeated death, who rose above hate and fear and doubt—stops being an abstract notion and is among us, that is when our lives begin to change. Our lives begin to transform to look like Christ, and we become true disciples.

*Adapted from “Small Groups” by Highland Park United Methodist Church, Dallas, Texas*