

*Who knows what true loneliness is —
not the conventional word but the naked terror?
— Joseph Conrad (Under Western Eyes)*

Is everything okay?

Strange feelings... Have you ever felt sad when looking at something lovely—a sunset, a high mountain valley, a tree in autumn glory? Can a wonderful piece of music make you feel melancholy? Have your thoughts ever turned to your own mortality when you come face to face with beauty in art or nature? Why do we enjoy reading stories with happy endings? When we watch a movie and everything is falling apart for the fictional people on the screen, why do we care so much?

All of these phenomena are common to humanity. All of them indicate a sense of incompleteness we all feel—a sense that something is not right, that things could somehow be much better. Where does this feeling come from?

*“If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.’ (1 Cor 15:44 NIV)
With these words, Paul sums up the Christian idea that Adam and Eve’s choice to sin divided their state of existence into at least two parts. These parts can be thought of as their body and soul, or metaphorically, as their “nakedness “ and “presence.” They are two halves of a disconnected whole, neither of which can survive for long alone. Before the fall, these human components were so perfectly interwoven that they could not be distinguished from each other, hence the first people “were naked, and they felt no shame.” But after Adam and Eve disobeyed God, a fundamental division occurred within their essence and suddenly they were outside themselves looking in, aware for the first time of their bodies as something separate from their consciousness.” (TGAM)*

We are all “bi-polar.” In the last chapter, we discussed the common reaction to paradox and antinomy: a feeling we must choose one side over the other, rather than accept them both by saying, “Yes. And yes.” In life we always rush to safe extremes; we are uncomfortable with the unresolved, the ill defined. Although experience shows again and again that very little in this world is truly black and white, we cannot seem to live within the gray.

“Most of the angst of life can be explained if I visualize my existence as a relentless swinging back and forth between the physical and spiritual “selves” in a never ending struggle to reunite the two.” (TGAM)

It all gets back to God... The closer we come to great beauty, the more we long to possess it. Yet at the deepest level this is impossible. All beauty is God’s reflection, and the closer we come to God, the more we sense our “nakedness,” our lack of preparation, our impending loss of self within His presence...

**GOD LOVES
AN HONEST QUESTION!**

(continued)

"No one may see me and live," said the Lord to Moses, and I think that's just as true of his better work on earth. Although I long to dive right in, I dare not go too far. I feel my spirit being drawn outside my body, an elastic band stretched to the limit, and I fear my soul will snap. As Jesus said, 'The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.' Think of the language of photography and paintings: I 'frame the view,' as if it were too large, or 'capture the scene,' as if it were the enemy. I pave nature, log it, fence it, and ignore it. Although I pretend not to hear, the smallest blades of grass and grains of sand whisper, 'he's God and you're no,' frightening me on a level I cannot even properly express. And if the least of God's creations reveals such intimidating majesty, how can I ever hope to be comfortable in his presence?" (TGAM)

- ▶ The Bible speaks often about fearing God. Christians commonly understand this as a certain kind of fear that we call "awe," which includes a deep respect or reverence. But the Bible records another common reaction to the Lord that might better be described as "terror." Read **Ge 3:10**, **Ex 20:18-19**, which kind of fear do these passages describe? Can you think of other Biblical characters who felt the other kind of fear? Why might these particular people have had one kind of fear, and not the other?
- ▶ All Christians believe Jesus came to earth to, show us how to live and to pay the price for our sins. Read **Job 9:32-35**. What additional reason for Jesus' earthly visit does it imply? (Hints: see **John 6:19-21**, **John 14:27**. and see also **John 11:35** and **Heb 4:15**.)
- ▶ In spite of the fact that we have the Holy Spirit within, in spite of the fact that we have trusted Jesus, we still sometimes feel the kind of melancholy described earlier in this lesson. Why? (Hint: **Philippians 3:10-14**)

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