

What Winter Can Teach Us About Solitude and Loneliness

In her book *The Woman in White*, Wilkie Collins writes, “It was cold and barren. It was no longer the view that I remembered. The sunshine of her presence was far from me. The charm of her voice no longer murmured in my ear.” This is an apt and beautifully personified description of winter and also, the feelings of solitude or loneliness that many of us face at one point or another. Loneliness can feel cold, deserted, hopeless, and drab. Likewise, the natural world goes through its own period of solitude, in the form of winter. The poets, writers, artists, and philosophers have given voice to winter, its solitude, sadness, and death. When we look to this seemingly dormant season, we can find hopeful clues about our own internal states of loneliness and how to navigate these often-overwhelming frozen waters. Additionally, we can learn about the crucial differences between loneliness and solitude.

Winter is barren. The trees are bare, animals go into hiding, and in certain parts of the country, white snow blankets the formerly green fields. Winter is cold, damp, and pushes us towards internalized feelings of self-reflection, solitude, and sometimes loneliness. When we look closer, we see that winter is a time of rest, repair, and preparation for spring, when everything is bright and in full bloom. Winter is a necessary part of the cycle of seasons. Maryann Moore wrote, “The cure for loneliness is solitude.” She meant that during times of deep self-reflection and aloneness, we can learn a lot about ourselves. Solitude is constructive and creates space for growth, whereas loneliness connotes a yearning and a sadness. Look to the space of winter when you’re feeling alone, as growth springs from times of solitude. If you’re lonely, remember the words of the great Romantic poet Percy Shelley: “If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”

RedCliff Ascent is a therapeutic wilderness program, nestled between two mountain ranges in the high desert of Enterprise, UT. We focus on adolescents ages 13-17 who are struggling with various challenges from anxiety and depression to school abandonment and the need to reconnect with their family. With over 25 years of experience, RedCliff uses a relational model and narrative therapy to drive an outcome and an evidence-based approach. RedCliff Recovery offers an experience like no other through a proven, 12-step, adventure-based wilderness program.

