

**Small Talk – September 27 2021**  
**By Michael Small**

***A Time for Solitude***

Small Talk has been on a bit of a hiatus. Times have been busy, and I am adapting to living with a new and outstanding puppy named Crouton. For those of you who have met her you would agree she is a delight. Am hoping to get back to a regular schedule with Small Talk up to three episodes per week.

Fall has arrived meaning that winter cannot be too far behind. There have already been lows below freezing in northern Minnesota. Things begin to slow down. Fewer tourists are present as they migrate south for the winter. Already establishments are moving toward “winter hours”. Halloween and Christmas items are showing up in the stores. And I suspect animals are beginning their migration and also preparing for the change of season. I think about bears who at some point, along with other animals, take refuge in being in a state of hibernation. In a sense, for them, this will be a long time of solitude.

I think most of you know that I am a dedicated listener of Krista Tippett on NPR. So too is Michael Piazza<sup>1</sup> who wrote this morning –

*This week, on her NPR show, "On Being," Krista Tippett had a conversation with Stephen Batchelor, a former Buddhist monk. His topic was how to make peace with being alone without being lonely.*

*After the solitude, isolation, and social distancing of the past 18 months of pandemic, it seems to me his wisdom might be beneficial to us all. As I pondered this, I realized people in some parts of the country--the ones suffering the most from COVID right now--carried on largely as they always had.*

*I've wondered if people in these regions feared solitude more than the virus. Their resistance and life choices have been attributed mostly to their conservative social and political values. Although if that is correct, it does not mean the two things are disconnected.*

*Batchelor said:*

***We can learn to actually create a solitude in which we feel at home and grounded. I think, crucially, it has to do with refining our capacity to see where our impulses are coming from, to what extent those impulses are just driven by conditioning and habit and fear, and to what extent we could somehow open up a nonreactive space within us. So, solitude, the practice of solitude, is the practice of creating***

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Piazza is a nationally known author, activist, and church growth consultant. He is the founder and president of Agile Church Consulting and the senior pastor of Broadway United Church of Christ on Manhattan's Upper West Side. You can follow him on Facebook and Twitter.

***an inward autonomy within ourselves, an inward freedom from the power of these overwhelming thoughts and emotions.***

*This seems to help explain why solitude is a fearsome thing to some who may not want to do too much introspection or self-examination. Jesus, who often is described as withdrawing to a solitary place, seemed to be a stranger to self-estrangement. Perhaps that was the real source of his power and authority.*

Let's all take time for solitude each day. I would encourage you to listen to the whole interview Stephen Bachelor in his segment of On-Being called *Finding Ease in Aloneness*. You may listen by going to <https://onbeing.org/programs/stephen-bachelor-finding-ease-in-aloneness/>.

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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