

### ***Lonely in Library-Land***

Shortly after the prophet Elijah had achieved a decisive victory over an army of false prophets, he fled into the wilderness, afraid that a wicked queen would make good on her promise to kill him. There he offered this complaint to God:

“I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” (1 Kings 19:10 ESV)

Elijah’s testimony revealed that, among other emotions, he felt a deep sense of loneliness. We may be quick to judge him for letting loneliness supersede spiritual reasoning. However, I believe that, as Christian librarians, we are susceptible to three forms of professional isolation. If we leave them unchecked, we can easily find ourselves in Elijah’s sad state.

First, we may face *geographic* isolation. Many of us are employed on small campuses. Most of our workplaces are distant from the urban centers where strategic decisions affecting libraries seem to be made. Some of us are solo librarians and thus lack the opportunity to collaborate with similarly credentialed professionals on a daily basis. My personal variant on geographic isolation is telecommuting: I work from home and see my coworkers only a handful of times each year.

Second, most of us encounter some form of *managerial* isolation. We are charged with implementing our superiors’ vision and we oversee others’ work. Propriety, confidentiality, and other factors can hinder us from sharing the burdens of management with others.

Third, many of us feel a measure of *spiritual* isolation within the mainstream of the library profession.

Secular influences tend to suppress Christian witness, while political activism diverts valuable resources to questionable causes. Discouraged, we may be inclined to join in Elijah’s chorus of self-pity.

How are we to respond when we feel lonely in Library-Land? Elijah’s story suggests two approaches that stand in delicate tension with one another.

First, we must resolve to *combat loneliness with spiritual resources* that God makes available to us. Ironically, when Elijah fled into the desert, he abandoned all chances to gain encouragement from other followers of the Lord. Elijah felt alone, but the land he left behind was home to thousands of believers and quite a number of prophets. Christians—in librarianship as in other occupations—need godly encouragement. ACL’s annual conference and listserv not only serve as venues for professional improvement, but provide opportunities for spiritual refreshment.

Second, we must *accept that loneliness does not equate with ineffectiveness*. God can use isolation, like other challenging circumstances, to drive us to depend more fully on Him. We tend to assess our service to the Lord by visible outcomes, but He is glorified when we obey Him and entrust the results to Him. Often God chooses to display His power and wisdom through vehicles that appear weak and foolish to worldly eyes.

The next time loneliness gnaws at your soul, take hope. God may use other believers to dull your pain, and if you open your heart, He will certainly accomplish His good purpose—even when you feel alone.

--Gregory A. Smith

*Mr. Gregory A. Smith serves as Director of Management Information Services for Liberty University’s Jerry Falwell Library.*