

15th May 2025

Respect

**“How sweet is harmless solitude! What can its joys control?
Tumults and noise may not intrude, to interrupt the soul.”**

Mary Mollineux, *Solitude* (1670)

When they were young, my children read the “Frog and Toad” books, written and illustrated by the American author, Arnold Lobel. Each book contains five simple, often humorous, sometimes poignant, short stories about a frog and toad. I remember them well as oft-read bedside stories.

In *Frog and Toad Together*, “Alone”, Toad arrives at Frog’s door to find a note saying he’s gone out because he wants to be alone. Toad can’t understand why his friend would want to be alone when he knows they value their companionship so much. So he searches for Frog and eventually finds him sitting alone on a rock in the middle of a river.

Toad assumes Frog must feel sad if he wants to be alone like this. So he makes a picnic lunch and brings it to the river. Riding out to the rock to meet Frog, Toad meets a turtle, who suggests that Frog should be left alone if he wants to be alone. It’s hard for Toad to take this in. He feels so insecure in his friendship that he calls out apologies to Frog for getting things wrong, getting himself in such a state that the lunch basket falls in the river, ruining the promised picnic. Helping Toad out of the river, Frog explains he wanted to be alone to think about how happy he is. The story concludes with the two friends sitting on the rock, being “alone together.”

Sometimes people we love do things that puzzle us, including wanting to be alone. We worry that they might crave solitude to get away from us, or because we’ve failed them, or as a rejection of our love. So we get anxious because of our perceived failures. We struggle with our feelings, and we might even feel resentful that we’ve been shut out. But, in truth, none of that is likely to be the case. It isn’t about “me” at all – as Toad thought. It’s about the needs and circumstances of the other person. For, as in Frog’s case, sometimes people just want to be alone.

“How sweet is harmless solitude!” Let’s respect that, and let the soul have some uninterrupted time for reflection, and healing, and much-needed restoration.

A prayer for today

Lord, solitude with my thoughts and prayers is never being alone.

It’s just me being alone together with You. Amen