Fear Example: Alone

Appears in #4, #9, #10, #12 | Areas: Self-Esteem, Security, Personal Relations, Pocket Book

References: Common Fears | Fear Inventory – Drill-Down | Fear Inventory – 4-Column | 4-Column Expanded

In both fear drill-down examples, "alone" is the convergence point – the place where most surface fears meet on their way to the root. Not good enough leads to alone. Unwanted leads to alone. Rejected leads to alone. Unloved leads to alone. It is the great nexus fear.

The NA Basic Text captures it: "We were hopeless, useless and lost. We were frightened and ran from the fear. No matter how far we ran, we always carried fear with us." (NA, Ch.3)

From Column 3: *"Wives stick by their husbands no matter what."* – the personal relations statement that reveals the fear: if she leaves, I'll be alone. And alone, I'll die.

Drill-Down: Alone as Root and Convergence Point

Alone – Drilling to the Root

When "alone" appears as a starting fear, the drill-down follows this chain:

(a) I Fear being…	(b) Why?	(c) Why?	(d) Why?	(e) Why?	(f) Why?
alone	emotional pain	using	dying	unknown	no God
				no God	self-reliance fails me

The chain reads: I fear being alone because alone means emotional pain. If I sit in emotional pain long enough, I will use. If I use, I will die. I fear dying because I fear the unknown. I fear the unknown because I fear there is no God. And if there is no God, then self-reliance is all I have – and self-reliance fails me.

> *alone --> emotional pain --> using --> dying --> unknown --> no God --> self-reliance fails me*

Convergence: Fears That Drill Down TO "Alone"

But "alone" is not just a fear that drills down. It is the fear that other fears drill down *to*. In both worked examples, nearly every surface fear passes through "alone" on the way to the root:

Surface Fear	Path	Convergence
not good enough	–> unwanted -->	**alone**
not respected	–> not valued -->	**alone**
unwanted	–>	**alone**
unloved	–>	**alone**
worthless	–>	**alone**
rejected	–>	**alone**
not acknowledged	–> unimportant --> unloved -->	**alone**
underpaid	–> not having enough --> you'll think less of me -->	**alone**
not valued	–> less than -->	**alone**

This is what makes "alone" the nexus fear. It is the hub through which most identity fears pass on their way to the deeper root of emotional pain, using, and dying. The drill-down does not go: "not good enough --> emotional pain." It goes: "not good enough --> unwanted --> **alone** --> emotional pain." There is always a stop at "alone."

Why This Matters

The convergence tells us something about the architecture of our fear. Most of our surface fears – about worth, about acceptance, about being enough – are not really about those things. They are about what those things mean for our connection to other people. And what we believe about connection is this: without it, we will be alone. And alone, we will be in pain. And in pain, we will use. And if we use, we will die.

Every identity fear is secretly a relational fear. Every relational fear is secretly a fear of being alone. Every fear of being alone is secretly a fear of dying. And every fear of dying is secretly a fear that there is no God.

> *"Self-reliance was good as far as it went, but it didn't go far enough."* (◆ BB p.68)

The drill-down always ends at the same place: self-reliance fails. And the reason self-reliance fails is that we were never meant to carry this alone. That is the whole point.

4-Column Brief

1. Fear of: Being alone – permanently, fundamentally. Not just temporarily without company, but existentially separated from all human connection. The fear that at the end of all the losing, all the failing, all the not-being-enough, there will be nobody left. And nobody coming.

2. Why: Insecurity, co-dependency, lack of faith, self-pity, self-centeredness, dishonesty. I believe I cannot survive alone. I have made other people the source of my OK-ness. Without them, I am nothing. I have placed my security in human beings who can leave, instead of in a God who cannot.

3. Self-Reliance: I cling to relationships. I tolerate abuse to avoid being alone. I jump from relationship to relationship. I use sex, money, charm, or helplessness to keep people close. I present a false self to be accepted. I isolate first to avoid being abandoned – choosing aloneness on my terms rather than risking it on theirs.

4. Better Way: "By surrendering control, we gain a far greater power." (NA Basic Text). God is always present. If I am with God, I am never truly alone. Solitude is not the same as loneliness – it can be a place where God speaks most clearly. The goal is not to never be alone. The goal is to find that alone with God is enough.

4-Column Medium

1. The Fear

Being alone. Not the temporary kind – not a quiet evening, not an empty apartment. The permanent kind. The kind where everyone who mattered has gone and no one is coming back. The kind that says: this is what you are, underneath everything. This is what's left when the performance stops working and the people stop staying.

It appears in four resentment examples:

- #4 My Wife: *"Wives stick by their husbands no matter what."* – If she leaves, I'm alone.
- #9 God Does Not Care About Me: *"I need to be strong and self-reliant to be OK."* – Because no one is coming to help.
- #10 Not Fulfilled Without a Relationship: *"I need to be loved by someone, to be OK."* – Without a relationship, I am alone. And alone, I die inside.
- #12 Not OK Without Money: *"Others should help me succeed and give me a break."* – Without money, no one stays. Without people, I am alone.

2. Why: Character Defects

Character defects at work: Insecurity, co-dependency, lack of faith, self-pity, self-centeredness, dishonesty, fear, people-pleasing, lust, impatience.

SDSF breakdown:

- **Selfish:** I use people to fill my emptiness rather than genuinely caring about them. My need to not feel alone takes priority over everything – including the other person's well-being.
- **Dishonest:** I present a false self to keep people close. I pretend to be who I think they want me to be. I tell myself I "need" another person to survive when what I really need is God.
- **Self-seeking:** I seek validation, attention, and presence from others to medicate the aloneness. I keep score. I manipulate with charm, guilt, helplessness, or sex to prevent people from leaving.

- **Fearful:** Underneath it all, I am terrified of discovering that I am not enough on my own. I am afraid that if I stop performing, everyone will see what I see – someone not worth staying for.

Areas of self affected:

- **Self-esteem:** I can't be OK alone. If no one wants me, I must be worthless. My sense of self depends entirely on whether someone else is present and approving.
- **Security:** I need someone to survive. Without another person, I feel physically and emotionally unsafe. I have made human beings my Higher Power.
- **Personal relations:** I demand others never leave. I cling, suffocate, manipulate, and perform – all to prevent the one thing I cannot tolerate. The statement from #4 says it plainly: *"Wives stick by their husbands no matter what."* No matter what. That is a demand, not a relationship.
- **Pocket book:** I use money to keep people close or to attract people. In #12, the fear underneath the money fear is: without money, no one stays. Money is not really about money. It is about not being alone.

3. Self-Reliance: The Self-Fulfilling Cycle

The cycle:

1. I fear being alone.
2. So I cling to whoever is closest.
3. The clinging suffocates the relationship.
4. They pull away or leave.
5. I am alone.
6. The fear is confirmed.
7. I conclude: "See – everyone leaves. I am unlovable."
8. I find someone new and cling harder.
9. Return to step 3.

The fear of being alone *creates* the aloneness. That is the self-fulfilling prophecy the Big Book describes: "It set in motion trains of circumstances which brought us misfortune we felt we didn't deserve. But did not we, ourselves, set the ball rolling?" (◆ BB p.67)

Behavioral patterns:

- Jumping from relationship to relationship, never being single long enough to face the fear.
- Tolerating abuse, dishonesty, or incompatibility because the alternative – being alone – is worse.
- Presenting a false self to attract and keep people. Being a chameleon.
- Using sex as a substitute for intimacy, confusing physical closeness with emotional connection.
- Isolating preemptively – if I leave first, they can't leave me.
- People-pleasing to the point of losing my identity. Saying yes when I mean no.
- Using money, gifts, or favors to buy loyalty and presence.
- Checking phones, seeking constant reassurance, monitoring whether the other person is "still there."

4. Better Way

> *"Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life." (◆ BB p.63)*

> *"By surrendering control, we gain a far greater power." (NA Basic Text, p.44)*

> *"We were frightened and ran from the fear. No matter how far we ran, we always carried fear with us." (NA, Ch.3) – Running from aloneness through relationships is still running. The fear travels with you into every relationship you enter. The only way to stop running is to turn around and face it – with God.*

Prayer: God, remove my fear of being alone. I have made other people my Higher Power. I have placed my security in arms that can let go, in voices that can go silent, in presences that can leave. Teach me that You are the presence that never leaves. Help me find in solitude what I have been demanding from people – peace, worth, and belonging. Let me be alone with You and discover that it is enough.

Cross-references: The fear of being alone connects directly to the fear of rejection/abandonment, intimacy/vulnerability, and not being good enough. In the resentment examples, it surfaces in the personal relations and security rows most often – the places where we demand that other people make us OK.

4-Column Expanded

Why – Expanded

Character defects with manifestations:

- **Insecurity:** I don't believe I can stand on my own. Every silence feels like abandonment. Every unanswered text feels like rejection. I scan constantly for signs that someone is about to leave.
- **Co-dependency:** I have fused my identity with another person's presence. When they are here, I exist. When they are gone, I disappear. I don't have a self apart from "us."
- **Lack of faith:** I say I believe in God, but I act as though human beings are my only source of safety. I pray for God's help but rely entirely on people. When people fail me, I conclude God has failed me.
- **Self-pity:** "No one understands how alone I am. No one knows what it's like. Other people have someone – I have no one." The self-pity makes the loneliness feel permanent and special, which justifies more desperate behavior.
- **Self-centeredness:** The fear of being alone is entirely about me. How *I* feel. What *I* need. Whether *I* am OK. The other person is not a person in this equation – they are a solution to my problem.
- **Dishonesty:** I pretend to be someone I'm not to keep people close. I hide my neediness behind charm or independence. I tell myself "I just want connection" when what I really want is someone to make the fear stop.
- **Fear:** The master defect. Fear of being alone drives every other defect on this list. The insecurity, the clinging, the dishonesty, the people-pleasing – they are all fear's employees.

- **People-pleasing:** I will be whoever you need me to be. I will agree with things I don't believe, tolerate things that hurt me, abandon my own values – anything to keep you from leaving. I have confused love with compliance.
- **Lust:** I use physical intimacy to create the illusion of closeness. Sex becomes the shortcut past vulnerability. If our bodies are together, I can pretend our hearts are too.
- **Impatience:** I cannot tolerate the waiting. I cannot sit in the gap between relationships. I cannot allow God's timing. I need someone *now* because the aloneness is unbearable *now*.

Cognitive distortions:

- **Catastrophising:** "If I'm alone, I'll always be alone. This is permanent. No one is coming. I will die like this." – Projecting a temporary state into an eternal sentence.
- **Emotional reasoning:** "I feel lonely, so I must be unlovable. The feeling is the evidence." – Confusing the intensity of the emotion with the reality of the situation.
- **Splitting:** "Either I'm in a relationship or I'm worthless. There is no middle ground. People who are alone are broken. People in relationships are whole." – Black-and-white thinking that eliminates any possibility of being OK alone.
- **Personalisation:** "They left because of me. It's always because of me. There is something fundamentally wrong with me that drives people away." – Taking responsibility for other people's choices and decisions as proof of personal deficiency.
- **False generalisation:** "No one has ever really loved me. Every relationship ends. People always leave. I always end up alone." – Taking specific experiences and making them universal laws.

Areas of self – detailed:

- **Self-esteem:** "I can't be OK alone." This is the core belief. My worth is not intrinsic – it is bestowed by the presence of another person. When someone stays, I have value. When they leave, I lose it. I have outsourced my sense of self to people who never agreed to carry it.
- **Security:** "I need someone to survive." This is not about companionship. It is about survival. I genuinely believe – in my body, in my nervous system – that being alone means danger. The belief predates rational thought. It lives in the part of me that was once a child who needed someone to stay alive.

- **Personal relations:** "I demand others never leave." The Column 3 statement from #4 – *"Wives stick by their husbands no matter what"* – is not a belief about marriage. It is a demand. No matter what I do, no matter how I behave, you must stay. That demand destroys the very relationship it is trying to protect, because a demand is not love. It is a cage.
- **Pocket book:** "I use money to keep people close or attract people." In #12, the fear underneath the money fear is aloneness. Without money, no one stays. Money becomes insurance against abandonment. I spend to impress, give to obligate, hoard to maintain the appearance of someone worth staying for.

Psychology:

John Bowlby's attachment theory provides the developmental framework for understanding the fear of being alone. Bowlby demonstrated that infants form attachment bonds with primary caregivers, and the quality of those bonds shapes how we relate to others for life. When caregivers are inconsistent – sometimes present, sometimes absent, sometimes nurturing, sometimes rejecting – the child develops what Bowlby called "anxious attachment." The anxiously attached person craves closeness but never trusts it. They monitor constantly for signs of abandonment. They cling, then withdraw, then cling again. They experience the ordinary rhythms of relationship – a delayed reply, a distracted partner, a cancelled plan – as existential threats. The fear of being alone, for the anxiously attached person, is not a preference. It is a survival response wired into the nervous system before language existed to name it.

Donald Winnicott, the British psychoanalyst, identified "the capacity to be alone" as one of the most important developmental achievements. But Winnicott's insight was paradoxical: the ability to be alone, he argued, can only develop in the presence of another person. A child learns to tolerate solitude by first being reliably accompanied – by having a caregiver who is consistently, quietly present. The child who was never reliably accompanied never develops the internal resource that makes solitude bearable. Object relations theory extends this: we seek in others what we could not internalize from early caregivers. The person who fears being alone is not weak or defective. They are someone who never received the foundational experience of being safely, consistently held – and so they seek it, over and over, in every relationship they enter. John Cacioppo's loneliness research at the University of Chicago demonstrated that loneliness is a perception, not an objective

state. People can be surrounded by others and feel profoundly lonely. People can be physically alone and feel deeply connected. Cacioppo found that chronic loneliness changes the brain – increasing threat vigilance, disrupting sleep, elevating cortisol – creating a physiological state that makes connection harder, not easier. The lonely person becomes hypervigilant to rejection, misreads neutral social cues as hostile, and withdraws further. Loneliness, like the fear of being alone, is self-reinforcing.

Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle – full detail:

It begins with the belief: I cannot be OK alone. This belief is not examined. It is not questioned. It is simply *true* – as true as gravity. From this belief, everything follows.

Because I cannot be OK alone, I must have someone. So I find someone. But I don't find them freely – I find them desperately. I scan for anyone who will stay. I lower my standards. I ignore red flags. I enter relationships not because this person is right for me, but because this person is *here*.

Once in the relationship, the fear doesn't stop. It shifts. Now I fear losing them. So I cling. I monitor. I check their phone, their tone, their mood. I read their silences as withdrawals. I interpret their independence as rejection. I make myself indispensable – or try to – by being whatever they need, doing whatever they want, abandoning whoever I am.

The clinging suffocates. The other person feels controlled, not loved. They pull away – not because I'm unlovable, but because they can't breathe. I feel the distance and panic. I cling harder. They pull further. Eventually, they leave. Or I leave first, to beat them to it.

And then I am alone. The very thing I feared. And the pain confirms the belief: I can't survive this. I was right. I am not enough. No one stays.

So I find someone new. Faster this time. More desperately. And the cycle begins again.

The cruelest part: the behavior driven by the fear of being alone is the very behavior that ensures I will be.

SDSF – full detail:

- **Selfish:** I use people as medication. Their presence numbs the fear. Their attention soothes the wound. I don't ask what they need – I take what I need. When I "love" someone, I am often loving what they do for my fear, not who they are. If they stop making me feel safe, I lose interest or resent them. My relationships are transactions disguised as love.
- **Dishonest:** I am a chameleon. I become whoever you need me to be, because the real me – the one who is afraid, who is needy, who is desperate – would drive you away. So I perform. I pretend to be confident when I'm terrified. I pretend to be easygoing when I'm consumed with anxiety. I pretend I don't care when you pull away, and then I obsess in private. The dishonesty is so deep I sometimes can't tell the performance from the person.
- **Self-seeking:** I seek reassurance the way an addict seeks a fix. "Do you love me? Are you sure? You're not going to leave?" And like a fix, the relief is temporary. Five minutes after you say "I love you," I need to hear it again. I manipulate with charm, with guilt, with helplessness, with sex – whatever works to keep you from walking away. I keep score: what I've given, what you owe me, what you'd better not forget.
- **Fearful:** The fear is the engine of everything. Every selfish act, every dishonest performance, every self-seeking manipulation is powered by the same terror: if you leave, I will be alone. If I am alone, I will be in pain. If I am in pain, I will use. If I use, I will die. The chain is always running in the background. Every relationship I enter is, at bottom, a negotiation with death.

Better Way – Expanded

> *"We ask Him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be. At once, we commence to outgrow fear."* (◆ BB p.68)

> *"We never apologize to anyone for depending upon our Creator. We can laugh at those who think spirituality the way of weakness. Paradoxically, it is the way of strength."* (◆ BB p.68)

> *"Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life."* (◆ BB p.63)

> *"By surrendering control, we gain a far greater power." (NA Basic Text, p.44)*

The spiritual dimension: loneliness vs. solitude.

There is a difference between loneliness and solitude. Loneliness is the absence of God-awareness. Solitude is the presence of God. They can look identical from the outside – a person sitting alone in a room. But inside, they are opposite experiences.

Loneliness says: no one is here. I am forgotten. I am abandoned. The universe is empty and I am floating in it without anchor.

Solitude says: I am here with God. The noise has stopped. The performing has stopped. The clinging has stopped. And in the silence, something else is present – something that was always present but drowned out by my desperate scrambling for human connection.

The fear of being alone is, at its root, a failure to believe that God is present. If God is present, I am never alone. Not in a room by myself. Not after a breakup. Not when the phone doesn't ring. Not when the last person leaves. If God is real, and if God is here, then "alone" is a feeling, not a fact. And feelings, as the Big Book teaches us, are not to be trusted as evidence.

> *"We never apologize to anyone for depending upon our Creator." (◆ BB p.68)*

This is not about replacing human connection with God and living as a hermit. Human connection matters. Fellowship matters. Relationships matter. But they cannot be the *foundation*. When I make another person my Higher Power – when I place in them the weight that only God can carry – I crush the relationship and I starve my spirit. The foundation must be God. Then, standing on that foundation, I can love freely instead of desperately. I can connect without clinging. I can be present with another person without needing them to be present with me.

Prayer: God, remove my fear of being alone. I have spent my life running from this fear – into relationships, into performance, into the arms of anyone who would hold me. I have made people into gods and then resented them for not being God. I have confused being loved with being safe, and being alone with being abandoned.

Teach me that solitude is not punishment. It is where You speak most clearly. Teach me that I can sit in an empty room and not be empty, because You are in the room. Teach me that the loneliness I have been running from is not the absence of people – it is the absence of You. And You have been here the whole time.

Help me build my life on You, not on whoever happens to be standing closest. Let me love people freely, without needing them to save me. Let me be alone without being afraid. And when the fear comes – because it will come – let me bring it to You instead of bringing it to the next person willing to hold me for a while. Amen.

Practical actions:

1. **Spend deliberate time alone in prayer.** Not scrolling. Not distracting. Alone with God, in silence, for 10 minutes. Then 15. Then 20. The fear of being alone cannot be outrun. It can only be outgrown by practicing aloneness in the presence of God.
2. **Build fellowship friendships before romantic relationships.** Get a home group. Get phone numbers. Make calls. Show up to fellowship events. The program teaches us how to be in relationship without the desperation of romance. Learn to be known and to know others without the stakes of "will they stay or leave."
3. **Practice sitting with the discomfort.** When the urge to text someone, to call someone, to find someone – just to not be alone – arises, sit with it. Set a timer for five minutes. Breathe. Pray. Let the wave of fear pass without acting on it. It will pass. It always passes.
4. **Write a gratitude list.** Right now. Not about what you wish you had. About what you have. A roof. A meeting. A sponsor. A God who is present. Recovery. Today. The antidote to "I have no one" is "look at what I have."
5. **Pray the Third Step prayer daily.** "God, I offer myself to Thee – to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will." (◆ BB p.63) The bondage of self includes the bondage of needing others to complete you. The Third Step prayer is a daily practice of placing the foundation where it belongs.

Sources: Alcoholics Anonymous ("Big Book") pp.60-68, 77, 84-88; Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Step 7; Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text, Chapters 3-5; Step 04 Fear Solution guide

(Step 04 21); John Bowlby, Attachment and Loss (1969); Donald Winnicott, "The Capacity to Be Alone" (1958); John Cacioppo, Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection (2008); Brene Brown, Daring Greatly (shame & vulnerability); Sponsorship Workshop Packet 2024

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