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Essays from West of 98 Lonesome and Lonely

By James M. Decker

There's a Texas country song from a few years ago with a chorus that includes the line "I love being lonesome but I don't like being lonely." The narrator sings about his inability to settle down in a stable relationship, but I have often thought about this line within the bigger picture of life particularly in the distinction between "lonesome" and "lonely."

"Lonesome" can be a wonderful feeling if it is wired into your personality. Standing out in the middle of a pasture looking toward the horizon. Driving down a quiet highway with no other humans in sight. Reading a book in silence on your back porch. Those are some of life's pleasures if you are wired to appreciate a lonesome feeling. It is not for everyone, but if it is for you, it is a wonderful, relaxing, mind-clearing opportunity.

"Lonely" is a different feeling. It's a feeling of lacking connection with other humans. Sometimes it is a short-term feeling, but other times, it is more prolonged. In many ways, our brains are designed for interaction with other humans on some level. Loneliness and isolation are not good for the psyche, especially when those feelings are not by choice. That is even more pronounced around family-centric holidays like Christmas, for folks who are grieving or missing healthy family connections. Too many folks are simply lonely around the holidays and that's a hard, miserable feeling. It is often deleterious on mental health,

too.

Over 30 years ago, a few members of St. John's United Methodist Church in Stamford vowed that no one in Stamford should be forced to be lonely on Christmas Day. On that first year, they delivered just short of 100 meals to shut-ins across town. Over the years, as I have shared many times in this space, this dinner has taken off. It now includes delivery, take-out, and dine-in options and now serves over 700 meals. It is remarkable and heartwarming to see fully 25% of the community participating in a single event on Christmas Day.

Last year, the Christmas Dinner was a victim of COVID-19. After extensive planning for a safe delivery of meals, numerous volunteers were quarantined on Christmas Day with COVID or COVID exposure (including myself). It was a heartbreaking turn of events. This year, the Christmas Dinner will prevail! We will take adequate health and safety precautions. We will be mindful of social distancing and



Singing Hayride! On Saturday, December 11, Robert Lee's Northside Church of Christ family and friends enjoyed a hayride to sing Christmas carols to people in their community. One special stop was to the Robert Lee Care Center to sing to residents there. After caroling, hot chocolate, sandwiches, and snacks were enjoyed by all.

protecting our most vulnerable citizens. But I think about something I heard from a citizen a month or so ago. She and her husband have eaten at the Christmas Dinner since I was a child and it is a highlight of their Christmas. She said "I'll sit six feet apart or even 12 feet apart, just as long as we get to have it!"

If you are like me and enjoy a lonesome feeling to relax and clear your mind, don't stop pursuing those moments in life. They can be fleeting and are so fulfilling when you find them.

But if you are lonely during this holiday season, I see you. I have been there. I have

experienced those feelings over the years, as have so many other people. Stamford is far from perfect, but here in this community, we do not want you to be lonely on Christmas Day. Come join us for a free meal. Heck if you don't live here, and are looking for a place on Christmas, come on down to Stamford! It's open to all. We'll stuff you to the gills with turkey, dressing, and all the fixings. If you are missing someone or

missing healthy family connections, just know that there are a bunch of people in Stamford who are glad to be your family on this Christmas Day.

James Decker is the Mayor of Stamford, Texas and the creator of the West of 98 website and podcast. Contact James and subscribe to these essays at westof98.substack.com and subscribe to West of 98 wherever podcasts are found.

Merry Christmas

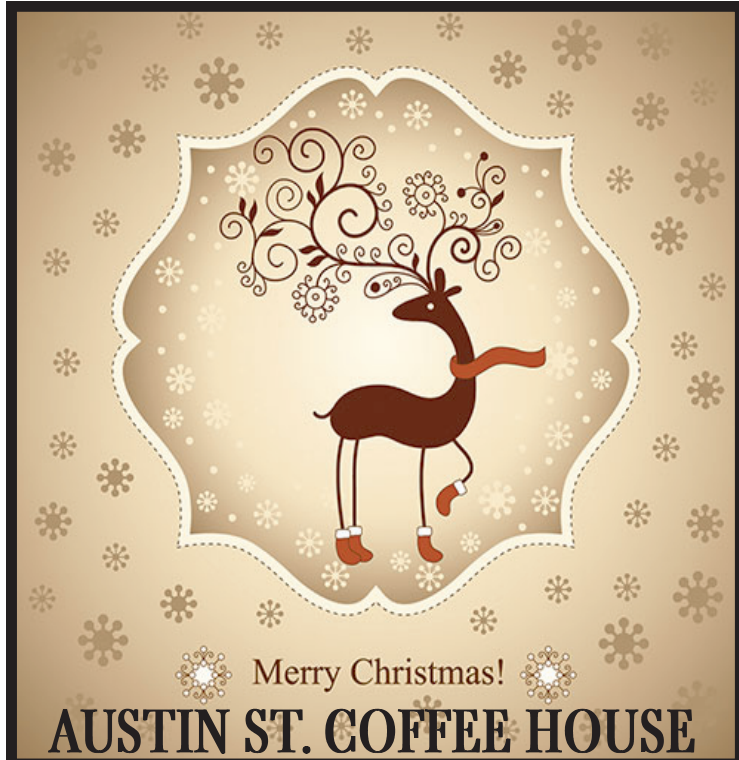


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Area Churches Invite You to Worship

Bronte

Bronte Church of Christ
 PO Box 346
 118 S. Jefferson • Bronte
 Sun. 10 am & 6 pm, Wed. 7 pm

Central Baptist Church
 324 S. Franklin • Bronte
 (325) 473-4811
 Dale Patterson, Pastor
 Sun. 10 am Sunday School
 11 am & 5 pm Worship

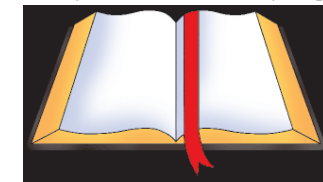
First Baptist Church
 424 S. Washington • Bronte
 (325) 473-2331
 Pastor George Cooper
 Sunday 9:45 am Sunday School,
 10:55 am Worship, 6 pm Bible
 Study & Worship
 Wednesday 6 pm RA's & GA's,
 6:30 pm Youth & Adults

First United Methodist Church
 Corner of Washington & Holmes
 Bronte
 (325) 473-3281
 Rev. Stacy Sprinkle, Pastor
 Sun. 10:00 am Sunday School
 11:00 am Worship

St. James Catholic Church
 215 N. Washington, Bronte
 (325) 365-2687

Rev. Yesu Mulakaleti, Jr., Pastor
 Sunday Bilingual Mass 8 am
4C Cowboy Church
 Drawer R • Bronte • (325) 895-4080
 Robert Lemmond, Pastor
 Sunday, 10:30 am - Texas Theater
 Wednesday Bible Study 6 pm -
 4C Feedlot Youth Building

Robert Lee
Bible Baptist Church
 PO Box 938 • 9th & Austin
 Sunday 10 am Sunday School,
 11 am and 5 pm Worship,
 Wed 5 pm Bible Study
Emmanuel Pentecostal
 PO Box 794 • 1004 Hillcrest
 Pastor Brantly Robertson
 (972) 841-2009
 Sundays 10 am, Wednesdays 7 pm



First United Methodist Church
 PO Box 144 • 9th & Chadbourne
 Robert Lee • (325) 453-2417
 Cyndi Weidner, Pastor
 Sun. 10 am Sunday School
 11 am Worship,
 5 pm Choir Practice

Iglesia Bautista Betel
 101 Houston • Robert Lee
 Sun. 9:45 am • Sunday School
 11 am Service • Bible Study Wed. 6 pm

Robert Lee Cowboy Church
 James Brunson, Pastor
 (469) 834-3932
 10:30 am Sunday • Robert Lee Rec Hall

Southside Church of Christ
 PO Box 698 • 8th & Houston
 Robert Lee (325) 453-2176
 Recardo Reyes, Preacher
 Sun. 10 am, Sunday School
 11 am & 6 pm, Worship
 Wed. 6 pm, Worship

Northside Church of Christ
 PO Box 508
 9th & Chadbourne • Robert Lee
 (325) 453-2685, (325) 763-2118 or
 (325) 473-1053

Services: Sun. 10 am
Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church
 601 W. 10th, Robert Lee
 (325) 365-2687
 Rev. Yesu Mulakaleti, Pastor
 Saturday Vigil Mass 5 pm
Robert Lee Baptist Church
 PO Box 493 • 22 W. 11th
 (325) 453-2724
 Chris Walls, Pastor
 Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School
 11 am & 7 pm, Worship
 Wed. 7 pm, Prayer Meeting

Victory Assembly of God
 (325) 453-2208, PO Box 638
 202 E. 6th Street, Robert Lee
 Rev. Rocky Youngblood, Pastor
 Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School
 10:45 am & 6 pm, Worship
 Wed. 6 pm, Bible Study

Coke County
Pecan Baptist
 PO Box 542 • 12 miles West of
 Robert Lee on Sterling City Hwy
 (325) 453-2065, Bill Hood, Pastor
www.pecanbaptistchurchrl.com
 Sun. 10 am, Sunday School
 11 am & 7 pm, Worship