

## Alone in a Crowded Room

A man is seen sitting in a room, surrounded by friends and family. At least, that's what someone looking on the scene from outside of it would perceive. To an outsider, the man is engaged in conversation with the people around him. He seems calm, healthy and happy even.

An outsider doesn't know that the man is usually much more animated: that in previous times this level of involvement would mean something was very wrong. An outsider, someone who is only just now perceiving the man, wouldn't see what the family and friends are seeing. An outsider would have no way of knowing that the man is acting towards the other people in the same room, the way he would normally act around mere associates.

But the family sees this. Each of them "knows" what is happening. They can feel the distance that is building. The increasing tension, not even noticed by the outsider, is barely perceived by them. They sit and wonder what they did to deserve such treatment. They try and justify what they're seeing, and not having the basis of knowledge on the matter, make their own assumptions. They worry and fear, or shrug and magnify the man's seeming indifference.

The family cannot see what the man sees. The room that they see is replaced by the open desert. The air conditioning, that to them is keeping the place cool, and placing a refreshing breeze in their faces, is a hot wind, blowing mockingly at him in the excessive heat.

He feels the wind in his face. His weapon is raised. The stalk of the M-16 is hot against his cheek, from the time it spent in the direct sun before he raised the weapon to meet the threat. He can feel the sweat dripping from his face and elbows, the force of the weapon against his shoulder as he uses its sling to pull it closer to him. The top of his helmet rests its weight upon the sight of the rifle and allows some of the steam that is built up under his helmet to escape.

He sees himself as alone in the desert. The only thing in his sight, is the frightened civilian before him. The only sound is the wind; the sharp snap of the rifle as he locked and loaded his weapon, is only an echo swirling about the memory of the wind. Seeing the frightened face before him as a mirror of his own feelings, he lowers the weapon as he has infinite times before. The man in front of him is once again gone. He is alone in the desert.

And then the scene repeats...

And repeats...

To him the only people around are himself, the civilian, and the Lord he cries up to asking "Why?" as the scene is replayed again and again. From his perspective, he is alone in the crowded room: the only one seeing the reality that is all around him. The journey from the desert to the crowded room is a long and arduous one. It is a journey that he must make with only those two other people: one that cannot be made any other way.

Those friends and family that worry so much about him can do nothing more than stand at the finish line and hope, until he comes close enough to cheer him on. You see: he is a long ways away, and alone. There is no way to join him on the desert.

He sees himself as alone, but God doesn't. Of all the views of the crowded room, His alone is accurate. He alone stands both in the room and the desert, the room is filled with His compassion and the desert, with His Hope.