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## CPYU (D) REVIEW By Walt Mueller



song/  
video

### "Lonely"

by Justin Bieber and Benny Blanco

#### Background/summary:

Released on **October 15, 2020**, this single garnered over 8 million views within the first 24 hours of release. Musically, the short two-and-half-minute song steps out of normal pop music routine of overproduction, with Bieber on vocals accompanied only by **Benny Blanco** on keyboard. The ballad is raw, vulnerable, and emotional. The same minimalist treatment is given to the dark, one-shot video which features actor Jacob Tremblay as the 13-year-old Justin Bieber. In the song, performed on *Saturday Night Live* the day after its release, the now **26-year-old** Bieber reflects back on what he was experiencing during the halfway point of his life.

### (D)iscover

#### WHAT IS THE MESSAGE/WORLDVIEW?

- The video begins pre-concert, with the young Bieber sitting alone in front of an off-stage dressing room mirror. The dressing room is large, filled with seats, mirrors, and sinks. . . every one of them strangely empty. Bieber frames the façade of his fame as he sings, "**Everybody knows my name now/But something 'bout it still feels strange/Like looking in a mirror, trying to steady yourself/And seeing somebody else.**" He laments the changes that have come so quickly through his childhood fame: "**Maybe when I'm older, it'll all calm down/But it's killing me now.**" With his fame has come paralyzing isolation.
- The camera swings around and Blanco is seen telling Bieber that it's time to go onstage. As he gets up out of his chair in the vacant dressing room, Bieber grabs a symbol of a more normal childhood, a hockey stick, and for a moment he is a child again (albeit sad) as he dribbles a hockey ball across the floor on his way to the stage. He sings, "**What if you had it all but nobody to call?/Maybe then, you'd know me/'Cause I've had everything/But no one's listening/And that's just f\_\_\_ing lonely.**" He then breaks into the simple chorus with a cry for help: "**I'm so lo-o-o-onely/Lo-o-o-onely.**"
- Even as he steps to the stage, the young Bieber's expression never changes from one lacking a blank affect. As he walks to the stage he sings about the mistakes he's made since gaining fame and fortune, mistakes that led him to drug abuse, depression, and anxiety. Rather than bringing happiness, his fame has brought heartache: "**Everybody knows my past now/Like my house was always made of glass/And maybe that's the price you pay/For the money and fame at an early age/And everybody saw me sick/And it felt like no one gave a s\_\_\_/They criticized the things I did/As an idiot kid.**"
- As the video comes to an end, the young Bieber steps to the center of the stage, a stage significantly void of any of the expected sets or lighting. The camera swings around to reveal an auditorium filled with nothing but empty seats. As the camera heads up the aisle, still focused on the young Bieber, viewers see that there is indeed one person seated in the auditorium. It is the 26-year-old Bieber himself. . . sitting alone. . . watching his lonely 13-year-old self on stage.



Walt Mueller is the President and Founder of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding.

## (D)iscern

### HOW DOES IT STAND IN LIGHT OF THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE/WORLDVIEW?

- From the first moment of creation, we have been made for relationship. We image the Triune God who said, "Let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness (**Genesis 1:26**). The Triune God said that "It is not good that man should be alone" (**Genesis 2:18**), and in response to that statement, God created the woman and placed humanity in relationship. Throughout the Scriptures, God speaks not only of His desire for relationship with humanity, but God tells us of our need to find our place in/and to function with other believers in the Body of Christ (the Church) (**Romans 12:4-5; Ephesians 4:16; I Corinthians 12:12-31; etc.**). Loneliness and broken relationships are a result of humankind's rebellion against God, and consequently evidence that things are not the way they are supposed to be.
- Because we are born in sin, our default setting is to seek glory for ourselves, rather than to fulfill our created purpose to honor and glorify God. Worship of self leads us to seek our meaning and identity in created things rather than the Creator. . . which is idolatry. In today's world, YouTube and other social media platforms have given us an avenue through which to spend time and effort seeking fame, celebrity, and the fortune that comes with it. But the Bible warns that this is foolishness, a dangerous path to take, and ultimately a spiritual dead-end. Our treasures are to be in heaven (**Matthew 6:19-21; Hebrews 13:5**), and we are not to love the world or the things of the world (**I John 2:15-16**). Justin Bieber is pulling back the curtain so we can see the emptiness that comes with fame and fortune.
- Vulnerability is necessary for followers of Jesus if we are to navigate life in spiritually healthy ways. First and foremost, we are to be vulnerable with God in prayer, as we cast all of our cares, concerns, and anxieties on Him because He truly cares for us and will bear our burdens (**I Peter 5:7**). Second, as members of the Body of Christ, we are called to bear each other's burdens (**Galatians 6:2**). To do so requires vulnerable burden-sharing and disclosure. Justin Bieber has opened up about himself in "Lonely." He has confessed that it has been a cathartic process, which reminds us of our need to do the same.
- Ultimately, God is our refuge and our strength. All of Scripture and the Psalms remind us that the place where we will find protection, relationship, and freedom from loneliness is in and through our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

## (D)ecide

### WHAT DO I DO WITH IT?

- This video can serve as a powerful diagnostic tool when used as a discussion starter with kids. Granted, there are two profane words in the song, which is certainly not justification for the use of profanity. Rather, in this case the use of these words in the context of the song pound home the personal angst Bieber communicates, providing a hard-hitting emphasis that might be absent void of their inclusion. That said, seek parental permission to play the song for kids. Then, ask kids **if** and **how** the song might speak for them. Allow the song to provide a window of opportunity into sparking the kind of greater vulnerability that reveals loneliness.
- Show the video to parents in order to give them a window into the experiential world of today's youth culture. (Don't overlook the fact that the song might speak to the loneliness of parents as well. It's no fluke that in its first week of release, it charted on Adult Contemporary stations.) Encourage parents to broach the issue of loneliness with their kids. Point parents to resources that will help them establish the kinds of social media borders and boundaries that will facilitate less time spent by family members online, and more time facilitating family togetherness, which is an antidote to loneliness.
- Talk about the differences between appearances and reality that exist in today's world. Discuss the ways in which "Lonely" undoes our assumptions regarding how fame, fortune, and celebrity bring happiness, fulfillment, and satisfaction. Debunk the myths that fuel the drive on social media for likes and follows, as if they will someday fulfill. And, talk about how social media fuels dissatisfaction and loneliness, as we compare our insides to the carefully fabricated/curated false "outsides" others choose to post. Encourage students to use social media honestly and in limited ways.
- Use the video as a prompt to look at what the Bible says about a variety of issues including identity, life in Christ's body, caring for one another, friendship, running to God as our refuge, the redemptive power of suffering and difficulty, the groaning of all Creation for ultimate redemption (**Romans 8**), and the benefits of perseverance through difficulties as part of our spiritual formation.