

DEALING WITH LONELINESS AS A CHRISTIAN

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Some of us have suffered from painful relationships and feel safer by withdrawing. Others desperately want a friend but don't know how to find one. Connections can break down over time and may take more effort than we want to rebuild.

Less than 100 years ago, life in the United States looked very different. Most families lived and worked together on farms. Their lives were deeply connected, and small communities thrived with strong networks. However, with the Industrial Revolution moving more people off the farm and into the cities, family life became less connected. The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, along with changes in no-fault divorce laws, permanently changed the social landscape.

At least half of us have grown up with divorced parents or parents who never married. Many of us grew up in families which may have stayed together yet were abusive or emotionally distant. Since our homes' social structures were broken, we have the cultural groundwork for becoming lonely.

The Bible says that God places the lonely in families (Psalm 68:6). Our families are supposed to be places of connection and refuge for us. Yet many of us didn't learn how to connect in our families and are following the cultural pressures to connect online rather than in person.

Dealing with Loneliness

Loneliness is different from being alone. You can be alone without feeling lonely. However, you can feel lonely even when surrounded by people.

Loneliness may have insecurity, sadness, disappointment or grief at its roots.

You must deal with the deeper issues to overcome loneliness.

Here are a few scenarios that can lead to loneliness:

- A child is painfully shy or socially awkward and has a hard time making friends at school.
- A college graduate moves away from home for a new job but knows no one in town.
- A stay-at-home mom of young children feels overwhelmed and isolated.
- A young man plays video games rather than socializing.
- A young woman longs to be married yet has trouble finding good guys to date.
- A wife is married to a workaholic husband.
- Parents are dealing with an empty nest.
- An elderly man's wife dies, and he is alone in his home.

Any of these situations can cause loneliness. If loneliness persists, it can turn into other problems. You need to get help for loneliness if you experience any of these symptoms.

- Only surface level connections with others
- No close friendships
- Feelings of isolation even around others
- Negative sense of self-worth
- Lack of reciprocation when you attempt to reach out
- Feeling drained around others when socializing

If you experience loneliness for several months or longer, it can have a negative impact on your physical and emotional health. Your body responds to loneliness-induced stress by producing more cortisol, a hormone that can cause inflammation in excessive amounts.

Untreated loneliness can lead to problems attached to inflammation, including the following:

- Insomnia
- Inability to concentrate
- Reduced immune system function
- Weight gain

- Insulin resistance

These issues can turn into more serious problems like depression, sleep disorders, eating disorders, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. You may be tempted to abuse substances to relieve your loneliness, which only exacerbates these health problems. Studies also indicate that long-term loneliness can reduce your lifespan. All these facts indicate the importance of getting help for loneliness before it turns into something worse.

When You Feel Alone

God doesn't want you to stay stuck in your loneliness. In Genesis 2, we learn that God considered Adam's state of being alone "not good," even inside a sinless creation. He created Eve as an ideal companion for Adam, and the two of them walked in fellowship with God. God also created you for fellowship with others, and he wants to help you connect with other people.

But how do you fight lonely feelings that bring you down? You can take deliberate steps now to beat loneliness.

Here are some suggestions for you to try this week:

Cultivate your relationship with the Lord. God is always available and ready to listen to you. As you read the Bible, pray and praise him, you will feel less lonely. Make your daily time with God a priority and pray that he will help you overcome loneliness.

Call a friend or family member. Many people only text one another, which is less personal than a phone call. It may seem a bit old-fashioned to you, but give it a try. This can be more convenient than an in-person meeting and can lift your spirits right away.

Get out of the house. If you spend most of your time at home, set a goal of getting out of the house a few times per week. A simple change in scenery can refresh you and connect you with others.

Change your routine. Do you order your groceries or clothing online? Switch to live shopping and see if you feel less lonely. Do you follow the home-work-home path? Change it up by joining a gym or book club after work. By changing your routine, you'll meet new people.

Attend church or join a church small group. Many of us don't attend church regularly, but churches are a great place to find people who are willing to connect. Be sure to attend a small group, where the connections really happen.

Be a friend to make a friend. If you are naturally shy and unassuming, you may be waiting for someone to move toward you in friendship. Yet when you make the first move, it builds your confidence and helps you practice social skills. Smiling, making eye contact and giving genuine compliments are great ways to start a conversation.

Try and try again. Your first, second or third attempts at making a friend might not work out. But that doesn't doom you to failure. Remember that there are many lonely people out there looking for a friend, just like you. It may take time to find a friend, but persistence will pay off.

Realize that loneliness is a choice. Being lonely is different from being alone. Learn to enjoy your own company. Make a list of things you like about yourself and find activities you truly enjoy doing on your own. You'll discover that alone times are gifts to savor, at least in balance with your relationships with others.

Stephen Ministers are especially trained to come alongside you to listen, care, encourage, and provide emotional and spiritual support during a time of loneliness. There are several ways to make arrangements to talk to a Stephen Minister.

(1) One way is to complete this confidential [Stephen Ministry form](#). Bob Bohler or Deb Williams will then contact you.

OR

(2) Call directly: Pastor Bob Bohler (706-549-9284) or Stephen Ministry Referrals Coordinator Deb Williams (706-247-9000).