

Connection Counteracts Loneliness

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According to U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, the health risk of loneliness is comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Mental health consequences can include depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation while physical ramifications can include a 29% increased risk of heart disease, 32% increased risk of stroke, and 50% increased risk of developing dementia.

Loneliness isn't about whether we're "alone" or "with people," it's about the condition of our connections. When people began spending more

time on social media than being with people, deep in-person connections deteriorated so much that, in the past twenty years, there has been a 70% decline in social connections for people aged 15 to 24.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) says "more than one-third of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely, and nearly one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are considered to be socially isolated." In the Indian Journal of Psychiatry, Sarvada Chandra Tiwari stated, "The problem due to pathological loneliness is increasing worldwide and needs to be handled as a disease; not just as a situation or a symptom of a disease or mere a social concept." The problem of loneliness is not a new one. Years ago, Mother Teresa said, "The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love..."

Following a 2015 study in the United Kingdom, psychology has emphasized positive benefits of *social prescribing*, otherwise known as *community referral*. Individuals are "prescribed" social interaction—connecting people to benefits such as walking groups, water aerobics, gardening, art classes, bike rides, and other activities intended to reduce isolation and loneliness.

When the Church is functioning as God designed, it provides connection—from Bible studies to exercise groups to men's outreach, from women's ministry to food pantries—with each point of connection removing bonds of isolation while delivering hope and practical help. Help ranges from car repair for single moms to childcare to household maintenance. Connection can emerge as music training, cooking classes, nature hikes, church picnics, caring for women who have unplanned pregnancies, hosting neighborhood Bible or sports' clubs—practical love in action.

Ephesians 4:4-6 (NASB) lists our connection through Christ: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, *one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all*. Let's live in the beautiful unity God provides, connected perfectly in His love. While we're at it, let's use the gifts God has given us—from mercy to teaching to serving to giving or encouraging others—intentionally building up the church (see Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4). When we function as one in the Lord, loneliness can become obsolete. Why not take the initiative to reach out to someone today?

Connecting Proactively

Choose what you think; focus on Truth.	<i>Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable... (Philippians 4:8, NLT).</i>
Spend time with people who live an authentic Christian life.	<i>Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does what is good is of God...(3 John 1:11, NASB).</i>
Listen to others, leaning toward them, focusing on each person as precious, created by God. “Seek to understand rather than be understood” (Francis of Assisi).	<i>...speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church (Ephesians 4:15, NLT).</i>
Participate in a small group in your church or community.	<i>Let’s see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshipping together as some do but spurring each other on... (Hebrews 10:24- 25, MSG).</i>
Trust in God, asking Him to show you how to use the gifts He has given you to encourage others.	<i>Look what happens to mighty warriors who do not trust in God. They trust their wealth instead and grow more and more bold in their wickedness (Psalm 52:7, NLT).</i>
Walk by faith, thankful God will accomplish His purpose for your life; actively express His love to others.	<i>For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (Ephesians 2:10, NASB).</i>
Get to know someone new this week—and ask God to show you somewhere you can volunteer to help.	<i>When God’s children are in need, be the one to help them out...(Romans 12:13a, NLT).</i>

If you think it would help to connect with a Christian counselor, you could visit the South Florida Association of Christian Counselors at <https://sfacc.net>. You could even start a group to work through *Core Healing from Trauma* (available on Amazon at <https://cutt.ly/IF185nO>), with free downloadable facilitators’ guides on the Palm Beach Counseling website at <https://www.pbcounseling.com/resources>).