



## The Obstacle of Loneliness

connect group resource

sunday 4 July

### How to use this resource

Each connect group is different and has its own character, focus, style of leadership and participation. These notes are designed to let the leader for the week pick and choose what best suits their group. There is too much here to cover in one meeting and many times you will only need to pick one idea to use.

These notes do not set out how to lead a group, open the meeting, worship, pray for others etc. Training for these skills will have been provided by your connect group co-ordinator.

If you have feedback and suggestions please talk to your campus connect group co-ordinator.

Each week there is a one page resource on the [church website](#) for individuals to use for their personal reflection or in discussion with family or friends.

Loneliness has been described the Victoria University Student Counselling Service as:

*"Loneliness is the painful awareness of not feeling connected to others. Loneliness is not necessarily being alone. We may be alone for long periods without feeling at all lonely. On the other hand we can feel our most lonely in a class with 300 other students or in the middle of a raging party."*

We could substitute the group of students with church members or work mates and a raging party with a church service or work place or other similar places where we spend time with people.



### IN THE BIBLE

**Start with asking a question** like this and encouraging conversation to develop – *if you had to pick just three of the biggest themes in the Bible what would your choices look like?* Write down each person's suggestion on a sheet of paper so you can review it next. If people are a bit shy then give each person a small piece of paper so they can write their answers on and then share them anonymously with the group. You will probably get a range of answers and probably the majority of responses will involve something to do with relationship between God and people and between people themselves.

**Look at these passages** or others people may think of and ask the group to comment upon the various angles of being in relationship contained in them.

[Romans 8:15](#)

[1 Kings 19:10](#)

[2 Timothy 1:15](#)

[Deuteronomy 5:3-5](#)

[Genesis 2:18](#)

[Jeremiah 32:38](#)

[John 15:12](#)

[Genesis 18:17-18](#)

[Genesis 1:26-27](#)

[1 Thessalonians 2:17](#)

[2 Peter 3:9](#)

[Acts 9:26-27 & 11:25-26](#)

There is so much evidence in Scripture that God desires relationship based upon love and this same desire is in us. **Ask the group to think of examples** from Jesus' life which shows what relationship with one another and with God looks like. **An option** to get people started is to allocate two or three chapters at

random from the gospels to pairs of people for them to browse the section descriptions, if these are in their version, and look for some of the examples. They can then share what they have found.

Many people look at [Acts 2:40-47](#) as the ideal expression of how Christians should live. Look at this passage and imagine what it was like from an emotional and relationship perspective. Let conversation speculate on some possibilities at that time. What was the cost to these early Christians in time, money, things, relationships etc? Could this happen again in our day? Our society is now so complex it is easier said than done. What part from the ideas shared by the group could be recreated by anyone even if it only meant impacting one person at a time? What would the cost look like for us?



## SPIRITUAL GROWTH

If you search Google with the words Overcoming Loneliness you will find that at least the first 100 responses have these two words in the page title. This is a common need in our society. The ones I had time to browse recommended solutions along the lines of becoming involved with established groups of people like clubs, sports teams, exercise clubs etc. These are all good practical ideas and often they will work to help people escape loneliness.

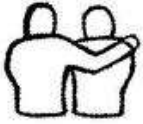
But, they are all attempting to solve the need without including God's place in the situation. If we want to be free of the obstacle of loneliness in our life whether or not we have friends or our much loved spouse or family member or friend has left or passed away then we need to first have overcome the following.

People involved in pastoral care have said that to break free from loneliness we need to first love ourselves. We need to see ourselves as God sees us. Not just at an intellectual understanding but with an understanding which is deep in our heart. Jesus talked about this and it is recorded in several places in the New Testament (must be important then) look at [Matthew 19:19; 22:39](#) [Mark 12:31-33](#); [Luke 10:27](#); [Romans 13:9](#); [Galatians 5:14](#); [James 2:8](#). When Jesus talked like this He wasn't thinking about someone who doesn't like themselves otherwise it wouldn't make sense. **Here is a suggestion:** share the thoughts in this section so far and then invite the Spirit of God to search us and reveal the hidden thoughts and opinions we hold about ourselves. Then ask these questions and wait for Him to speak to each person. The first question each person in the group needs to know the answer to is: **do I love myself?** The second question is: **how do I see myself?** These are not questions which usually generate an instant answer so allow time and suggest people share in twos or threes or in the whole group, whichever is likely to allow everyone to be open and honest.

Here is the next question to put to people: **how does God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit see you?** I work on the basis that they are always in unity so each one thinks the identical thought about me. Now in my experience, most people answer this question with something like God (meaning the Father) loves me but He would be happier with me (meaning accept me more) if I were to do something (meaning stop a sin, read the Bible more, pray more or something like that) differently. Many never want to consider the question because they had such a bad human father experience and this taints the image of God the Father. But here is the truth: God the Father is madly in love with you and dreams about you all the time. He is the centre of the story often known as the story of the prodigal (means wastefully or recklessly extravagant) son [Luke 15:11](#) – the father in this story is an image of God the Father.

The same pastoral carers I mentioned earlier in this section also say that if someone else, say a friend, thinks more highly of you than you are prepared to think about yourself, then you will sabotage (means destroy) the relationship. Why? Because you don't feel you deserve to be thought of like that. Have you ever believed in someone more than they are prepared to believe in themselves and they refuse to come up to your level of belief? What did they say and do? The only way they can come up to your level is when they, as Jesus said, "love yourself". Then they will find friendships easier to form. And they will find that their friendship with God is so strong that it will be sufficient in all circumstances even when lonely.

So the bottom line is that we all need to love ourselves then connections with other people can follow.



## CARING & SHARING

The first three parts of this series has focused upon the obstacles of fear, negativity and failure. These are all closely linked in life and have similar ways to overcome them. In fact, it is possible to focus on one of these if the person is facing all three obstacles. Once one is beaten the other two will also probably be beaten. Now we look at the obstacle of loneliness and it is different. With the first three someone can pretty much make a decision to turn away from the thinking and associated actions which come with fear, negativity and failure. They, with God, can reach victory. They might get help from trained people like counsellors, pastoral carers and doctors. Overcoming the obstacle of loneliness is different; it usually takes the involvement of other everyday people. Pastoral carers and counsellors can give advice and help with things like spiritual, emotional and with social skills issues but it is rare that they can become a close friend as well.

Read out the quote about loneliness at the start of these notes. **Ask this question.** Is it possible to be lonely in a city of hundreds of thousands of people ..... in a family ..... in a work place ..... in a church ..... in a connect group? **Follow up with this question** – why is that?

Chances are you will hear a range of answers, many of which will be based upon personal experience or personal observation of others. Spend time talking about the differences between life now in this society and ask people to contrast it with life they may have experienced in the past when much younger or in a different land before settling in NZ.

**Ask this question:** why are some people lonely? There will be answers which cover things like: it's a choice; past hurts in relationships mean people will not trust again; they are difficult people to be friends with; they are high needs people; others just don't have the time; everyone is busy; others are comfortable with their own circle of friends; it's too much effort; the lonely don't make the effort to be a friend.

**Ask this question:** why do people feel lonely? Some of the answers to this question are contained in the *In the Bible* section and the message given on Sunday.

Now is the time to plunge in the deep end and get personal. It may be suitable to do this in a large group or in smaller groups of three or four people. Reread the quotation at the start. **Ask each person to share**, if they are willing, whether or not they have ever felt lonely – when, what was the circumstance, what happened, how did they overcome the loneliness, are they still lonely? Many immigrants will have gone through such a time.

It will be important for you as a leader to support those who are lonely and find a way to help them. In this you will need to rely upon the wisdom and leading of the Holy Spirit. Close with prayer of encouragement and blessing over each person. If someone has opened up that they are lonely you need to be ready to help them in the role of leader and also through other group members. It will probably take time outside the group to find out why the person is lonely and to identify things they can do to change in addition to others reaching out. This is the blessing and cost of being a connect group leader.



## REACHING OTHERS

Viki, the pastor for the Tamil congregation at **East Campus**, helps many Tamil speaking people in Auckland who are not Christian, the connection he has with them is through a common language and culture. He told me that the Tamil speaking people in Auckland who are not an active part of a church find it quite lonely coming to New Zealand. When illness or hardship arises they are often alone without the wider family support they enjoyed in their home country. He said that those who are active in a Christian group are much better supported and less likely to feel lonely. A common way the Tamil Christian community connects and share life is through meals together. These are simple to arrange and break through the obstacle of loneliness; they become a safe way to include a stranger.

In the **City campus** people are reaching out to the international tertiary students who come here to gain qualifications and English language skills. The work they are undertaking is outstanding and needed because one of the biggest needs these foreign students face is loneliness. Often shared meals in the church (special events and after a Sunday service) and in homes help break through the barrier of loneliness. People in the church are being friends but most importantly they have the opportunity to share Jesus and provide the most important connection in their life.

At the **South campus** a soup kitchen ministry has started. Initially it was on a monthly basis but now is more frequent. This is a further opportunity to help people who are lonely to meet some other people and make the journey towards being connected to someone. Again week-by-week they can discover the connection with Jesus and meet other people who value them as a person.

In these cases shared meals are a common feature, they break so many barriers. It is what happened in Bible times as well – it's a really good 'model'. Not everything has to be a full on meal. In our culture today God has blessed us with cafés – these are perfect places to socialise with people in a non-threatening manner. It used to be the pub was the only place to gather in a non-threatening place to meet with people we didn't know well – that's why I say 'thank God for cafés'.