



HELP FOR **loneliness**



Giving Light to Our World

After placing 37,760 silent phone calls to directory assistance, a 44-year old Japanese man explained that he simply wanted to listen to the kind voices of female telephone operators. He confessed to making around 900 calls per day from his mobile phone. "When I made a complaint call once, the operator dealt with it very kindly," he told police.¹

In the setting of the most technologically connected world ever, the current generation is facing an epidemic of loneliness. Some of these lonely people suffer unseen in nursing homes; others grab headlines when, in an apparent final attempt to be known, they gun down a classroom of children. Far more of the lonely seem connected and normal but long for deeper and more meaningful relationships.

Whether or not you *feel* lonely is not the whole issue. When we fail to have close, supportive relationships, our own health suffers. In the middle of illness we are not as strong. For example, Harvard University published data on 2,835 women who were diagnosed with breast cancer over a ten-year period. The research team looked at each woman's social support. Compared to women who were well integrated socially, those who were socially isolated showed more than double the risk of dying from breast cancer during the decade-long study. Additionally, the socially isolated women were 67 percent more likely to die from any cause.

This remarkable finding is not unique. The medical literature reminds us that loneliness is not only tragic, but can also physically damage our bodies.

STRATEGIES TO COMBAT LONELINESS

Fortunately, you are not doomed to live a life of loneliness. Here are seven powerful strategies that can help you become more connected with those around you. You don't need to implement all seven. However, the more you put into practice, the better the likelihood that you will expand your social connections.

1. Step out of your comfort zone to meet like-minded people. If you're a gardening enthusiast, join a local gardening club. If you want to make a difference in your community, why not join a service organization? Look for clubs and organizations in your city or town that interest you. Check online, in the old-fashioned Yellow Pages, in the newspaper, or call your local chamber of commerce.

2. Get a pet. Companion animals are a great tool for making friends. If you're having trouble connecting with people in your neighborhood, consider adopting a likeable dog from the local shelter. In the context of walking your dog, going to a dog park, or even running errands with your pet, you'll likely be surprised how much social interaction is created.

3. Seek out those lonelier than yourself. If you don't feel very connected in your workplace, look for

someone else who seems to be a loner. If that individual rejects your attempt at friendship, try to develop relationships in a setting where your attempts are more likely to be accepted. As already mentioned, extended care facilities have many lonely people and are easy to find. Why not contact a local nursing home and see if the administration would allow you to share something to brighten someone's day? Your initial visit might involve giving away a potted plant or some of those already-read books on your bookshelf.

4. Volunteer. Many workplaces don't encourage the development of close social ties. Today's neighborhoods and apartments often seem engineered to insulate and isolate rather than to create connectedness. However, stepping into a volunteer position often provides an opportunity to engage with other staff (and often those you serve) in more meaningful ways. Furthermore, medical research shows that volunteerism itself is health enhancing.

5. Reconnect with family. Make family time a priority—even if there are tensions in your relationships. Although emotionally difficult, one of the most powerful socially-connecting practices is making wrongs right and fixing broken relationships. If you've isolated yourself from a family member who wounded you, why not lovingly confront him or her and communicate your willingness to forgive?

On the other hand, if you have good relations with children or grandchildren, plan to strengthen those ties. Many of today's activities don't maximize social interaction. Entertainment-based family time tends to be big on the entertainment and small on the family.

6. Connect on a vertical level. Throughout history some of the world's most lasting friendships were founded on a common spiritual foundation. Regardless of your spiritual roots, why not consider a fresh reading of the Bible? Arguably no single book has promoted social connectedness in North America more than the Bible. A great place to start is with the New Testament's four gospels. Many scholars believe that the Bible was written not only to connect you with the Divine, but also with other people.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

7. Harness synergy. Each of the preceding six strategies can be powerful by itself. However, if you do more than one at the same time you can multiply their impact. Since most of us (even lonely people) are busy, the more we can accomplish with a single activity, the better. Consider the following:

- **Combine a refocus on spiritual things with volunteerism and community service.** Help a church or other faith group that is actively making a difference in your community. For example, more congregations are getting involved in health initiatives.

If you're having trouble finding one, check out the websites of community-based health programs that work closely with houses of faith such as CREATION Health (creationhealth.com), The Complete Health Improvement Program (chiphealth.com), or The Nedley Depression Recovery Program (nedley-depressionrecovery.com).

- **Make family time a time of spiritual growth.**

Whether you're a single parent with an only child, a grandparent with limited access to your grandchildren, or a busy person living at home with more than one adult and multiple children, you can still make this work. When you can get even a couple of people together for ten minutes to read from spiritually uplifting material, you will find connectedness. Social scientists testify to the value of such content-rich family associations. The reading and discussion will bring you closer together and help ensure that your children or grandchildren know how to express themselves with more than a tweet or text message.

8. Get Professional Help. This final point serves as a bonus strategy—one you probably won't need if you're already carrying out some of the preceding strategies. However, if loneliness has moved to depression—and you have thoughts of harming yourself or others—reach out and tell someone. If you don't know where to turn, try the toll-free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: [1-800-273-TALK \(8255\)](tel:1-800-273-TALK).

CONCLUSION

The man who placed 37,760 phone calls to directory assistance faced the same loneliness you may be facing right now. Ultimately, there is only one Being who can satisfy your thirst for deep connection and unfailing friendship: God. He says, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you” (**Jeremiah 31:3**). God doesn’t hang up, give up, or give the cold shoulder. Why not check out the Bible study plan offered on the back panel?

1 <http://news.sky.com/story/448338/man-makes-37760-silent-phone-calls>

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**GIVING LIGHT
TO OUR WORLD**

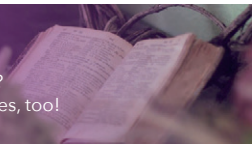


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