

# Loneliness



**L**oneliness” and “being alone” are not at all the same thing. Living alone is for some people a life choice with its own rewards and drawbacks. Loneliness can happen to us all, for a wide range of different reasons, and the effects can be devastating and lasting.

The psychologist Melanie Klein, in a study of early childhood development, offers insight into the feelings of an infant who has been left by a parent:

- a feeling of disintegration or falling apart, “going to pieces”.
- a feeling of being abandoned, that nobody loves us or wants us.
- a feeling that people are acting as if we are not there.

These same deep and painful feelings can be experienced in adult life. We need to provide lonely people in our midst with support, encouragement and understanding.



## God’s family

God’s gift of grace brings us into fellowship with God, Jesus and each other. Clearly God does not intend us to be lonely. Yet God’s creation of this astonishing universe also suggests that God does not intend us to be alike: trees, birds, sea creatures, humans – so

many, so varied. God plans diversity – in every aspect of His creation.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul writes of the diversity God has ordained for His family: *“God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be?”* (v.18-19)

God’s gift of grace is the basis of our membership of God’s family and also of our fellowship with each other. However, just because people belong to a family doesn’t necessarily mean they feel they belong. If the fellowship we have is fellowship indeed, it provides its “fellows” with a sense of belonging.

1 John 3:18 says: *“Let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth”*. This verse distinguishes between the talk and the walk. We are to act out our love for one another.

## Various Kinds of Loneliness

### ***Loneliness of difference***

This may occur when a person feels they do not “fit in”, that they are somehow “different”. In Psalm 150, a psalm of praise to God, a variety of musical instruments is mentioned: *“Praise him with the strings”, “praise him with the cymbals”*. A whole orchestra is used: a diversity of players, with different skills and abilities, each contributing their unique sound and melody to the music.

The functioning of the household needs the talents of each member: artistic or dramatic gifts, management skills, expertise in letter-writing, thinking, gardening, or information technology. All these diverse personalities and gifts contribute to and enrich our fellowship family. If we don’t choose to use and celebrate the talents that people bring, we may create feelings of rejection and uselessness. Sadly, of course, we also lose out.

As Paul sees it, we need to value all the various parts of 'the body', creating people who are fulfilled and dynamic in their service to God and to each other. Remember, God is expecting to find the diversity He created among the people in His household.

### **Loneliness of being alone**

Being alone does not equate with loneliness, yet people who are alone can feel there is no one to talk to or listen to, no one to know about them or to ask.



Some people have no family in the meeting. Some may have lost the family members who shared the fellowship with them in the past. In some families, loneliness can result from the over-commitment of a family member to work - either inside or outside

the ecclesia. Where is fellowship in situations like these?

Scripture gives us some ideas: Philippians 2:1-4 speaks of comfort, tenderness and compassion in supporting others:

*"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort of his love, if any fellowship with the spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others."*

Romans 12:15 speaks of sharing joys and sorrows with one another in a sincere love: *"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."* Care, support and sharing are ways our fellowship can help lonely people.

### **Loneliness of people with physical or mental difficulties**

Many stories are told of Jesus' compassion towards people struggling with illness. These people are

different, sometimes unable to participate in everyday events, needing special arrangements made for them to take their part in group activities.

Jesus showed sensitivity, understanding and tenderness towards the deaf, the blind, the crippled, the ill and the mentally disturbed. He took the initiative to approach them, spoke directly to them, sometimes touching them gently with his hands. He is our model in dealing with these folk.

Acts of kindness, compassion and inclusion in our everyday life may seem small and insignificant but they reveal the depth of our fellowship with God and Jesus. When we appreciate the challenge that illness, whether temporary or chronic, causes people, our understanding and compassion can bring relief and comfort and strength.



### **True fellowship is the antidote to loneliness in the ecclesia**

True fellowship respects, uses and rejoices in diversity.

True fellowship reflects God's loving support of us, honouring each and every member, regardless of their personal and social situation.

True fellowship brings a "sense of belonging" to us all.

True fellowship offers compassion and encouragement in times of illness or weakness.

This kind of fellowship shows that God's grace truly touches our individual lives in the ecclesia.