

One and Only

The Only One

We have a loneliness problem. Each of us can feel like we are the only one who feels alone, unknown, and unloved. God has a plan for our lives, but it is not the elimination of loneliness. It is something more. God's plan for our lives, our being made in His image (God is love) is more than "loneliness avoidance". God's plan for our lives is that we learn to love, to participate in the school of love, and be an image of His love to the world.

Discussion Questions

1. Name one time when you have been lonely. This could be a time from your youth or it could be more recent. When you were younger, what did you do when you were lonely? What do you do now?
2. There is a major difference between sadness and depression. If you are able, would you be willing to share an experience of dealing with mental illness or emotional trauma in your life? (*This is a deeper question, but those who have been meeting for a while might be comfortable enough to be vulnerable with each other*).
3. The main goal in life is not to be content or to avoid loneliness/sadness. Does this idea encourage you or discourage you? Why or why not? What might it mean to know that the primary reason you are on the earth is to learn to love?
4. The idea that we are made for love can seem daunting or "abstract". But it is incredibly practical. What are the practical ways that you have been called upon to love someone in the last week? Did you respond as you were called to, or could you have handled it better?
5. Adam was put into an *exstasis*. What is one practical way in which you find yourself being drawn out of yourself? On a scale of 1-10, how often do you notice other people in a meaningful way?
6. Ennie Hickman hosts "Love Your Neighbor" events. How could you do something similar?

God in Real Life

- I. Avoiding loneliness is not the goal. The goal is to become someone who goes out of themselves, notices others, and becomes a gift of love. The invitation this week is to take real steps toward reaching out to your literal neighbor/family member/friend and share a meal without intentional distractions.

Be Transformed

Scripture often reveals words of loneliness and the longing for more:

- A. The author of Ecclesiastes (Solomon) offered wise advice about companions. Companions are not only a balm, but they help in the mission. He writes: “Two are better than one: They get a good wage for their toil. If the one falls, the other will help the fallen one. But woe to the solitary person! If that one should fall, there is no other to help. So also, if two sleep together, they keep each other warm. How can one alone keep warm? Where one alone may be overcome, two together can resist. A three-ply cord* is not easily broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)
 - B. God understands your loneliness. The Letter to the Hebrews states, “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help” (Hebrews 4:14-16).
 - C. Psalm 102 is a plaintive cry of one who has been left alone. It is the call of one in deep and profound distress. Like many of the Psalms, the psalmist turns in the midst of his pain to praise God’s faithfulness....even when he is alone. (Psalm 102).
 - D. “Pope Benedict XVI wrote that a person can choose to live in one of two ways, “more inclined to shutting off or more inclined toward communion... he can so shut himself up in selfishness that the body is nothing more than a division, a limit, preventing any communion, and he no longer really encounters anyone in it... But bodily existence can also be lived in the opposite way: as opening oneself up, as the developing freedom of a person who shares himself.” (Ratzinger, *God Is Near Us*, p.80).
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To the Heart

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Co 10:13).

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).