

When God created man, he declared that it was not good for him to be alone. In the modern world, we are more connected than ever, and yet loneliness persists and results in several physical and psychological pathologies that are strikingly common in the populations of most nations. How do we combat loneliness? Let's spend some time this week looking into what can be done to connect us to others.

## Day 1

### Connect with God

The first step in connecting with other people will seem like an obvious Sunday school answer. We must connect with God. Although this sounds cliché, it is true. Why must we connect with God in order to connect with others? Because we need the proper connection with people. When I was working at K-Mart in Joplin, Missouri while attending college, I would often have the experience of having "hillbillies" come into the store, and for someone from the valley it was an educational experience. The old trope of rural people shouting at each other instead of just talking to each other turned out to be truer than I suspected, and it became apparent very quickly that the dysfunction that was hidden in most families was out in the open in certain cultures. It was not pleasant to witness, and it made me understand why some people turn to solitude and become hermits. What we really need, and what we really need to give others, is not just relationship but healthy relationship, and without knowing God or his word, most of us will struggle to give something healthy, because our desire will be to meet our own needs, instead of the needs of others. When your self-worth comes from your relationship with God, it helps you to go into relationships in a much healthier way, making your interactions meet the needs of others, and curiously, your own needs as well. Like King David who spent his youth in prayer and meditation to God, we must find our footing with others in that prime relationship with the Almighty.

Verses: Revelation 3:20, 2 Timothy 3:17, Psalm 119:1-8

Prayer Topics: Trust, Confidence, Reciprocity

## Day 2

### Limit Screen Time

Today's devotional is the most likely advice this week to be misunderstood or ignored. Many people are so attached to their phones and devices that they will react defensively to the suggestion that they might be better off spending less time with them. Before we get any further into this topic, let me just say that this prescription doesn't apply to everyone. In addition, I am not saying that every relationship that you have through your electronic device is unhealthy, nor am I saying that electronics cannot enhance a real-life relationship. So, what am I saying? Well, I read something interesting recently about how most people now spend more time on their phones than ever before, and yet most people also hate getting phone calls. It seems that modern man wishes to communicate primarily through texting because of the convenience of being able to reply whenever it suits him, and being interrupted with a call irritates him. I understand this, and also see that it can be unhealthy. The more we demand that our interactions with others fit into our schedules, the more we want to lower the cost of our relationships, the more we will find that they are not very valuable to us. Jesus tells us that where our treasures are, there our hearts are as well. There is an inescapable logic to this statement that applies to many areas of life. People are a burden, as they should be. Be careful how light you make that burden.

Verses: Galatians 6:2, Psalm 55:22, Matthew 11:28-30

Prayer Topics: Perspective, Responsibility, Exchange

## Day 3

### Don't Run from Commitment

In an extension of yesterday's devotion, we must make sure we don't run from commitments if we are to have good relationships with others. The only way to have relationships of value is to value them, and you cannot do that while refusing to pay their price. I have seen many instances throughout my years as a pastor of this misunderstanding play out in people's lives. I have had numerous conversations over the years with people who felt like they didn't have a relational fit within their families, within their communities, or within the church, who at the same time would not make any real commitments to any of those groups. If you show up to the gym haphazardly, or you attend a ballroom dancing lesson at a whim, or you show up to your college classes whenever you feel like it, don't expect to make much progress. Anything you want to excel at requires a commitment, and relationships are no different. The very best thing that we do for each other is to affirm each other's value, and you cannot do that on the cheap. If you want to have strong relationships, they will be very costly, and if you will not pay the cost, you will not have much spent on you. I was recently watching a video on the few remaining Sears stores left in the United States (yes, there are few, for now), and the person shooting the video was remarking about the emptiness of the stores, and how they didn't have much merchandise to sell. It is not surprising that if a store has no merchandise, it won't make many sales. Paying for an inventory is a huge commitment, but if a store refuses to make this commitment and pay for the merchandise, very few people will pay the store. Commitment is a cost, and a risk, but without it there is no real relationship.

Verses: Luke 9:62, Proverbs 16:3, Numbers 30:2

Prayer Topics: Promise, Dedication, Endurance

## Day 4

### Forgive

In yesterday's devotion, I encouraged us to pay the price of commitments to others. Maybe in the past you did that, and perhaps you got burned. You might be hesitant to do that again, and so you have resigned yourself to loneliness. If that is where you find yourself, it may be that there is room for more forgiveness in your life. People will let you down, not always, but enough to hurt you deeply. When that happens, forgiveness and wisdom must join forces to help us to get to a better place with our relationships. First, if we refuse to forgive, we will most likely be unwilling to take future risks with our commitments. If Sears must close a few stores, they might not be willing to risk buying inventory, but if they don't, they will go out of business. Forgiveness is essential to you, not just to the person you are forgiving. Next, we must gain wisdom. Sears has only a handful of stores left, and they are scattered throughout the country, making their costs very high. This means that their attempts at a comeback will most likely end in failure. Just because you forgive and return to making commitments to others doesn't mean you don't learn anything from your failed or disappointing relationships. Be wise about the commitments you make. The bible tells us to be as wise as serpents, and as innocent as doves, so forgive, but be smart in the way you conduct yourself.

Verses: Matthew 6:14-15, Ephesians 4:31-32, Mark 11:25, Matthew 18:21-22

Prayer Topics: Wisdom, Grace, Understanding, Peace

## Day 5

### Develop Goals & Interests

One thing that I have often noticed about people who struggle with relationships is that they often have a low effort approach to the world. In order to have something to offer in a relationship, it is necessary to have goals and interests, and be doing things in the world that you can tell others about and join with others in completing. Most people don't have relationships about nothing, but instead the relationship revolves around some common interest or activity, and if you have no common interests or activities, you will find it hard to have something in common with someone. Have you noticed, in your life or in the lives of others you know, that even people without real friends often have work "friends"? Why is this? Because often this is the only real thing a person does, and therefore the other people at their job have this one thing in common with them. God created us to take dominion over the world, and taking an interest in the world is often a necessary step in creating relationships, because most of the time our relationships are expressions of our cooperative efforts to take dominion over some aspect of life. What do you like to do? Find something that puts you into community with others. Take dominion, and find relationships therein.

Verses: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Proverbs 27:9, Proverbs 27:17

Prayer Topics: Avocation, Incorporation, Recreation, Progress