



What is the loneliest situation you have ever been in?

[Teacher Note: Share a personal story about when you felt lonely. The point is to reflect on how painful loneliness can be to emphasize the importance of relationships in our lives.]

When I think of times in my past when I was lonely, I first think of a time when I was on a mission trip to Guatemala in college. I woke up sick after the first night. The mission team left me behind to rest at the place where we were staying and went out to do their work for the day. Halfway through the day, I felt better, so I left my room and went to a common area to try to find someone. The only people there were some cooks who only spoke Spanish. At that moment, I realized that I was as far away from my family as I had ever been. I had no idea where I was, couldn't communicate with the people around me, and had no way of contacting anyone if I needed to. This was before smartphones. Yes, I'm old. Anyway, it was a scary feeling. But I knew I was okay, because I was at a secure facility, and my mission team would be back at the end of the day. So, the feeling did not last very long.

But that's not the loneliest I have ever felt. The loneliest time of my life was after I got out of college and before I met my wife. I had just left an environment where I had roommates and saw friends every day. Then I found myself living in an apartment alone and working. I had no friends who lived near me, and I had no clue how long that season of my life would last. As far as I knew, I would live alone for the rest of my life in a small town with very few people my age.

I think loneliness is the worst feeling in the world. A close second is the feeling of rejection. And a big reason rejection hurts so bad is because it leaves you feeling alone.

Genesis 2:18a (NLT)

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone."

We were made in God's image, and God is a relational God. He exists in a holy relationship we call "The Trinity." And it is not good for us to be alone.

We need others to walk through life with us who we can love us and be loved by us.

Lots of different people come in and out of our lives. We cannot choose most of them. We can't choose our nuclear family. We can't always choose our teachers, coaches, classmates, bosses, etc.

But there is one group of people we get to choose, which also happens to be the group that most impacts how lonely we feel. The group I am referring to is our friends.

Now, there are different levels of friendship. There are loads of ways to categorize your friends. A quick Google search will reveal more ways than you could ever want. But for our purposes, let's organize our friends into three groups:

- Acquaintances
- Friends
- Best Friends

Acquaintances are people in your life that you are friendly with. They might be classmates, teammates, or followers on social media. You generally enjoy interacting with them but don't regularly seek out interactions with them. You don't know much about them. But they are enjoyable to interact with.

Friends are people you seek out for a purpose. These might be people you sit with at lunch, play online games with, or hang out with from time-to-time. You know more about them. But you might not necessarily run to them first in times of need, and you probably don't feel a need to be in constant contact with them.

Best friends are your people. You live life with them. You trust them. You know how they are going to react in any situation. You probably have a constant text message conversation with them, and if you go more than a few hours without hearing from them, you start to wonder if they're okay.

Every single one of us has acquaintances. We all have people we enjoy in our lives but don't know well enough to be called a friend.

But I am guessing that not everyone in this room currently feels like they have friends or best friends. Maybe you have friends but no one you consider a best friend. Or, perhaps some of you used to have a best friend, but they are not your best friend anymore, and you feel like you'll never trust someone enough to let them that close to you again.

And for those of you who are fortunate enough to have a lot of friends and a whole group of besties, my guess is that hasn't always been the case. Maybe there have been times or certain places where you felt all alone.

Regardless of where you are currently on the "You Have Friends?" scale, let's spend some time today talking about how to choose our friends and how to become friends with people.

I don't know about you, but I have never really had a process for how I went about selecting who I would be friends with. I usually just hung out with people who happened to come into my life with whom I had a lot in common. This is not always the best way to choose friends. Choosing friends this way has gotten me in trouble a few times because I did not choose wisely.

The Bible is full of wisdom on how to choose friends. Here are a few examples:

Proverbs 12:26 (NIV)

The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Proverbs 13:20 (NLT)

Walk with the wise and become wise, Associate with fools and get in trouble.

Proverbs 22:24-25 (NLT)

Don't befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul.

1 Corinthians 15:33b (NLT)

Bad company corrupts good character.



What's the most awkward thing you've ever done?

Do you struggle with social anxiety? If so, how does that show itself?

We talked about Moses in large group. Can you think of other Bible characters who may have struggled with social anxiety?

Matthew 10:19-20 (NLT)

When you are arrested, don't worry about how to respond or what to say. God will give you the right words at the right time. For it is not you who will be speaking—it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

In this scripture, Jesus sends out the Apostles to tell others about Jesus. He promises they will be arrested and flogged for it. And yet, when He tells them not to worry about what they will say.

Why would the Apostles be worried about what to say? How do you think they overcame those worries to tell others about Christ?

Have you ever felt the Holy Spirit's power when you were speaking? If so, what was it like? If not, what do you think that would be like?

What advice would you give someone younger about how to get through the social struggles of middle/high school?

1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

What does it look like to give all your worries and cares to God? Have you ever done that?

Do cares and worries ever get in the way of being a good friend? If so, how?

How might giving our worries and cares to God help us as we seek to be good friends?

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Prayer

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