UNDERSTANDING LONELINESS

"How do I stop feeling lonely?"

THE HOPE LINE



TheHopeLine.com



Are you Lonely?

A lot of people feel lonely or isolated. They feel like they have no friends that understand them. In a world full of people, there are many who can't seem to find friends or make relationships that last. In fact, loneliness is on the rise.

Consider this:

- The rate of loneliness in the U.S. has doubled over the past thirty years. About 40% of Americans report being lonely; in the 1980s, it was 20%.
- The number of Americans who say they have no close friends has roughly tripled in recent decades. (General Social Survey)
- Loneliness affects 60 million Americans
- "Zero" is also the most common response when people are asked how many confidants they have. (General Social Survey)

Seasons of mild loneliness are totally normal, but it is important to not let yourself stay in a constant state of loneliness for both mental and physical health reasons.

Also, feelings of loneliness can be a real obstacle to happiness. To be happy we need intimate bonds with others. We need to have people we can confide in, a community we feel like we belong and where we can get and give support.

If you are struggling with the feeling of loneliness, know that you are not alone and there are steps you can take to help alleviate loneliness.



Types of Loneliness - Situational vs. Chronic

There are times or situations in everyone's life that leave us feeling lonely for a season. This is normal. These seasons of loneliness can be caused by a number of situations such as:



...a move to a new city

...a loved one died





...a change of school or job

...a new social network with people that are very different than you...you don't have a common bond of faith or culture or interests, etc.





...you have no romantic interest at the time.

Situational loneliness is often temporary as you eventually move forward and create new deep relationships.

Chronic loneliness is a continual state of feeling lonely with no end in sight. You have a void of real emotional bonds with anyone that you can trust and confide in.

WARNING: Do not let your situational loneliness turn into chronic loneliness. Sometimes you can start to feel ashamed about being lonely for a season, and you start to think of yourself as a loser and then become reluctant to meet new people.

Licensed psychologist, author and speaker, Guy Winch, PhD, says:

"Loneliness creates a deep psychological wound that distorts our perceptions and scrambles our thinking. It makes us think that those around us care much less than they actually do. It also makes us afraid to reach out because we don't want to set ourselves up for rejection and heartache when our heart is already aching."

Health Risks of loneliness:

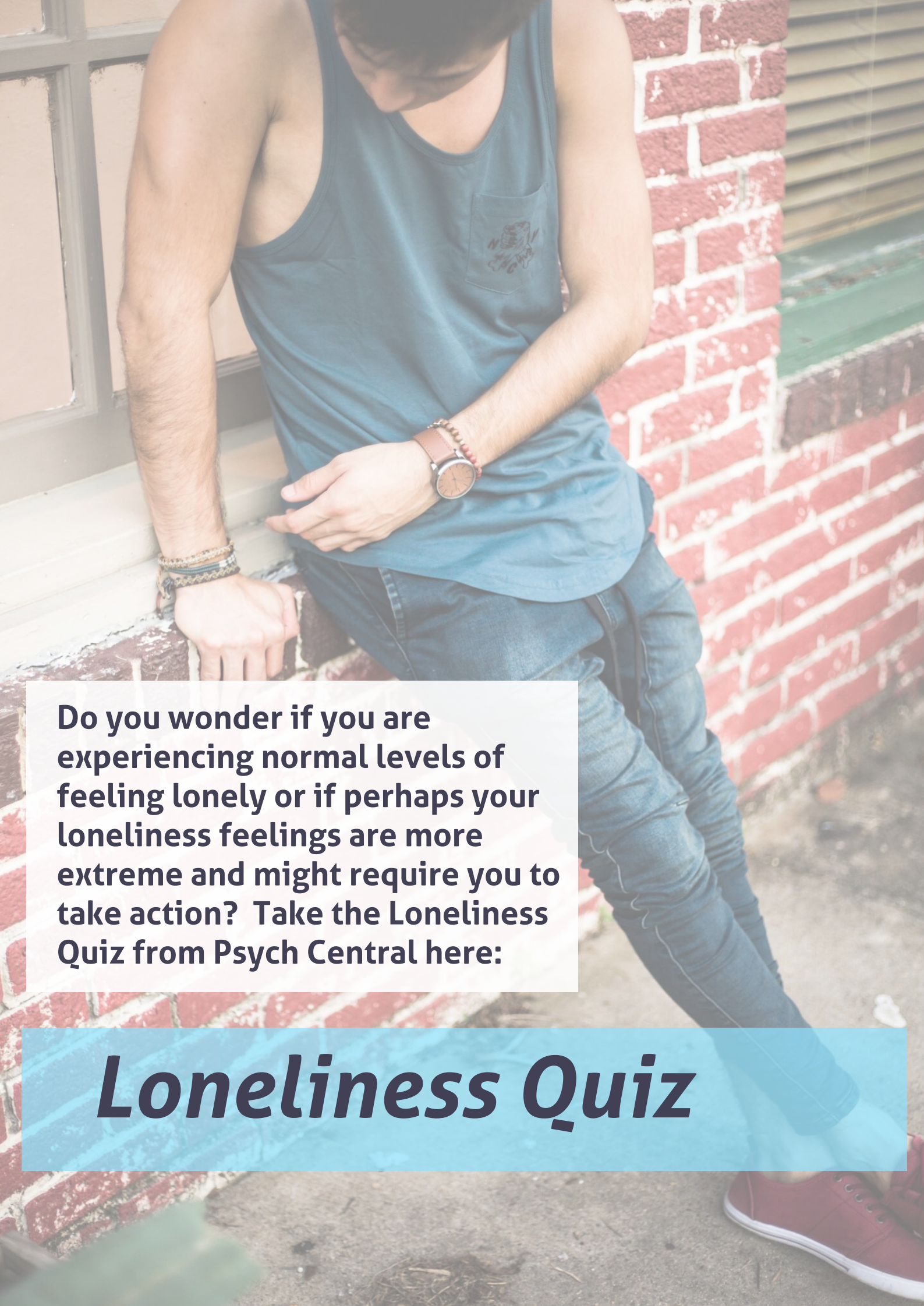
Everyone feels lonely at one point or another in their life, but chronic loneliness poses a serious health risk. Recent research shows that loneliness and isolation are as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, obesity and alcoholism (Holt-Lunstad, 2015).

loneliness = smoking 15 cigs a day

The medical community is recognizing that loneliness needs to be given equal attention as diet, sleep, and exercise.

Simply stated, studies show that loneliness leads to the release of an overabundance of stress hormones and other chemicals which lead to a chronic inflammatory state which:

- damages the heart
- reduces one's capacity to resist infection
- promotes loss of bone and muscle.
- increases the risk for early death by 45%
- increases the risk for developing dementia in later life by 64%
- increases the risk of depression



Do you wonder if you are experiencing normal levels of feeling lonely or if perhaps your loneliness feelings are more extreme and might require you to take action? Take the Loneliness Quiz from Psych Central here:

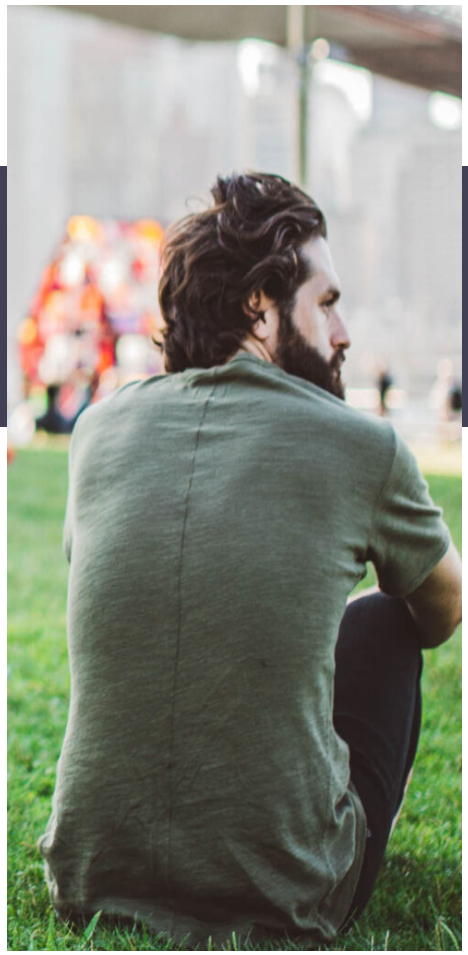
Loneliness Quiz



LONELINESS IS A FEELING, NOT A FACT. YOU CAN HAVE ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE AND STILL FEEL LONELY.

Feeling lonely, What can you do?

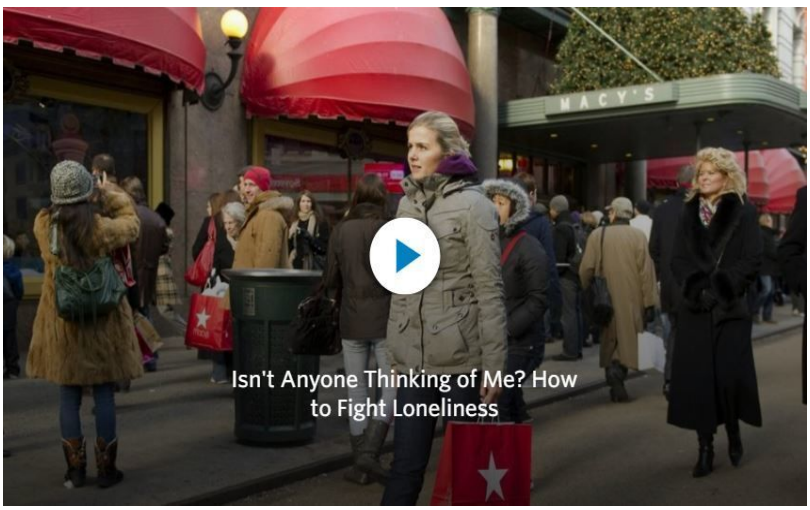






10 Things to Do if You Feel Lonely:

Realize you are not unusual - the statistics show you are not alone in feeling lonely. 40% of people are just like you. This doesn't make the feeling any easier, but it may help to know you are more of the norm.



Let loneliness remind you of the value of connecting with others - Don't give up on the importance of connecting with others. Let this feeling motivate you to seek relationships.

Identify your loneliness thoughts -Write down some of the negative thoughts that you have when you are lonely. Do you think things like:

- I will always be alone.
- If I am alone, I have to feel lonely and unhappy.
- I must be a loser, because I am alone.
- No one must like me.
- Something must be wrong with me.

If so, try to come up with ***rational responses*** to those thoughts:

- Are you really always going to be alone or might you be interacting with people soon...at work, school, church, waiting in line, or participating in an activity. You are not on a deserted island.
- Do you have to feel sad because you are alone? Or could you embrace this time to do something you like. Read a book, bake, fish, golf. Just because you are alone doesn't mean that you have to feel sad and lonely.
- Are you really a "loser" because you are alone? Everyone is alone at some time or another. Being alone is a situation — and situations change.

Use alone time wisely - If you find yourself alone, you can choose to dwell in your loneliness or attempt to use your alone time to do a solo activity that you enjoy and become good at it. Maybe it's reading, cooking,

golfing, fishing, etc. Then use your new skill as a way to connect with others. Find a group with similar interest or use it as a conversation starter.



Get offline - The internet can make us feel lonely because we attempt to substitute real relationships with online relationships. Though we temporarily feel better when we engage others virtually, these connections tend to be superficial and ultimately dissatisfying. Yet lonely people can exert so much energy to feel connected online that they don't put forth effort to build offline fulfilling relationships. Additionally, the internet can get in the way when you are actually with someone in person, but you are both constantly on your phones. Meaningful conversation still won't occur if you are both online.

Don't miss positive social cues - Lonely people can be so wrapped up in their feelings of loneliness that they are less able to pick up on positive social cues, like others' attention and or signals from others that they are willing to commit to a friendship. Without picking up on these cues, lonely people withdraw prematurely. Open your eyes and look for what others may be communicating to you.

Fight the emotional habit of loneliness Realize you are dealing with an emotional habit and be willing to do the hard work of combatting it. Invite someone to hang out or initiate a conversation. It will be worth it. The emotion of loneliness can pass, depending on what you're thinking and what you're doing.

Check out this Tedx Talks video:
The Simple Cure for Loneliness

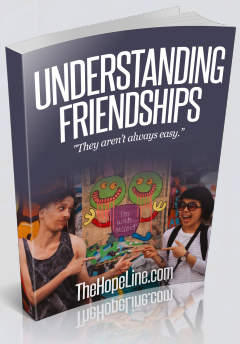


Focus on the needs and feelings of others -
Shifting your focus from how bad you've got it to how you can bless others will go a long way in combatting loneliness.



Develop realistic expectations - If you are expecting a new friend to call you constantly or spend time together daily, or share every detail of their life, you may be disappointed. Your friendship is not diminished if your time together is limited. People have busy lives and are balancing many relationships and work or school. Don't give up on a relationship just because they aren't able to give as much as you expect.

Download our free Guide: Understanding Friendships - Learn great tips for meeting, making and being a great friend.



Still lonely?

For some people there may be deeper roots to their loneliness. Here are some root issues to consider:



Genuine Social Phobia or Social Anxiety Disorder.

This is defined as the extreme fear of being scrutinized and judged by others in social or performance situations. People with social phobias don't seek out social activities because they believe that they will embarrass themselves or be criticized by others. Staying away from people is a way of staying away from that fear. Sadly, that tactic only makes things worse. A person who seldom engages with others becomes less and less confident that they even know how.



Depression

Depression can cause loneliness in two ways. One, someone with depression often does not have the desire or ability to make the effort of meeting people or going out. Two, they can be so negative and down that people stop trying to be their friend.



Low Self-Esteem

Sometimes people have had a series of experiences that have left them discouraged and beaten down. Their self-esteem has been shaken to the core. They are just not willing to put themselves out there to be shamed again.



Highly sensitive temperament

Some people's temperament is just more sensitive than others. They are easily hurt and confused when someone is thoughtless or is unable to give them enough time or attention. They take too many things far too personally which makes them very vulnerable causing them to stay where they feel safe.



Lack of social skills

Some people just never learned how to initiate contact with new people or maintain friendships. Maybe they grew up in families that were isolated for one reason or another, but the result is an adult who feels awkward around others and who doesn't understand the give and take of social relationships.

If you are lonelier than you want to be and recognize yourself in any of these descriptions, start with caring for yourself. Perhaps therapy is a good option if you are dealing with a social phobia or depression. It can also help teach coping mechanisms for highly sensitive people. Counseling is also a good option if you have a lot of pain in your past that has left you with low self-esteem.

You can also educate yourself with our eBooks on Anxiety, Depression and Self-Worth.

Loneliness within a Marriage



While it is often assumed that when you get married you will never be lonely again because you now have a life partner, the truth is MANY people feel lonely within their marriages. Physical proximity does not mean emotional connection. And this is sometimes the hardest kind of loneliness because you expect so much more.

How does the disconnect start?

- Conversations become simply transactional—"*Could you stop and buy toilet paper?*" "*Your mother called,*" or "*I'm going out with the guys tonight.*"
- Stop having meaningful conversations that seek input from your spouse about view points, experiences, and things you've learned.
- Stop doing shared activities.
- Being in the same house, but always in seperate rooms doing your own thing.
- Going to bed at different times.

8 Tips to fight loneliness in a marriage:

1. Don't play the blame game.

Do not blame yourself or your spouse. Rather look at the situation and ask yourself "What's making me lonely in my marriage?" and then "What could I change and what could my spouse change to help the situation?"

2. Forgive past hurts.

If you have been feeling alone for a while, chances are you have been harboring some hurt. Nothing breeds loneliness more than unforgiveness. You need to make the decision to forgive.

3. Do the hard work to rebuild connection.

Do not assume your marriage is doomed. You can reconnect with each other. It will take some time and effort but it can be done.

4. Be patient.

Both you and your spouse will have to learn to use some "connection muscles" you haven't exercised for a while and habits take a while to break.

5. Take the iniative.

If you're lonely, chances are your partner is too. Initiate conversations that are not about transactional details. Ask them for their views about something they care about and make sure to show them you're listening.

6. Create shared experiences.

This could be as simple as watching the same TV show. Demonstrate interest in something that interests them. Or suggest you cook a meal together or take a walk.

7. Make your time count.

When you do make an effort to spend time together, also make an effort to set aside distractions and focus on each other.

8. Don't overlook physical connectedness.



This is not just referring to sexual intimacy, though that is certainly an important part of marital closeness, but also bring back smaller examples of physical touch such as holding hands, a neck massages, sitting close on the couch, etc. Getting closer physically will naturally lead to feeling closer emotionally.

How to help a friend:

If you know someone who's lonely, here are some simple things you can do to make a difference:

- Don't text. Use the phone.
- If you leave a message and don't get a return call, call back.
- Plan a comfortable, low-stress outing...a walk, coffee, movie.
- Don't make light of their feelings of loneliness or brush them off.
- Share this Guide.

Never underestimate the power of simple connection...a simple "Hello" or a moment to ask a real question to a coworker, neighbor, family member. That shared moment could make all the difference.



"If [a lonely person] is able make one more friend, the loneliness starts to diminish," says Jacqueline Olds, MD, co-author of The Lonely American. ***"All sorts of scary things become possible when you have a friend to do them with."***

A Spiritual Perspective on

God created us to live in community with one another. To love and care for each other. He wants us to "be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.....To practice hospitality. To rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. To live in harmony with one another." (Romans 12:10-15)

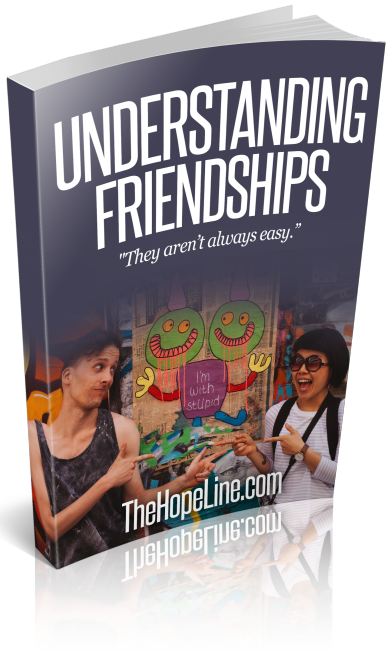
However, when that community is lacking in our lives for a season and we feel lonely, it is important for us to know that we are never truly alone. God promises to never us abandon us (Deuteronomy 31:6) and to always be with us and strengthen and help us and uphold us (Isaiah 41:10). If you are facing a season of feeling isolated, lean on God. Learn to trust him through prayer and reading the Bible. Welcome His presence in your life.

Satan will use times loneliness to fill our heads with lies about our worth and value, and steal our hope for our future. But Jesus says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10) God also promises us HOPE even in the midst of loneliness, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

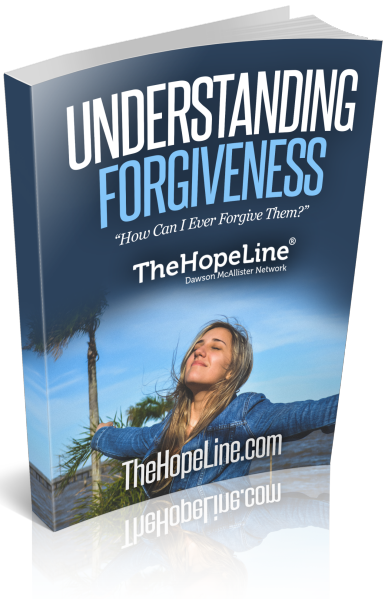
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If you want to know more about a life full with Jesus or have questions about loneliness, chat online anytime with a HopeCoach at TheHopeLine.com.





Do you need help with friendships? Learn more meeting new friends, maintaining strong freindships, and more in our Guide: Understanding Friendships.



Are you holding onto unforgiveness towards someone. Learn how to start forgiving with our Guide: Understanding Forgiveness.

Or find more of TheHopeLine's Guides, on Depression, Cheating, Suicide, Eating Disorders, Anxiety, Lying, Broken Hearts, here: http://www.thehopeline.com/guides/

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