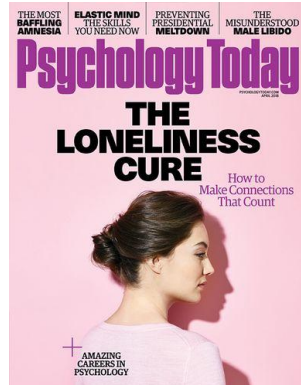


The Silent Killer in the Church Pew: Loneliness

It was the cover that caught my attention.

For most of us, we never think of loneliness as a major health or psychological issue. After all, we've all had moments when we've felt lonely, and we probably think Lucy's solution is all we need:

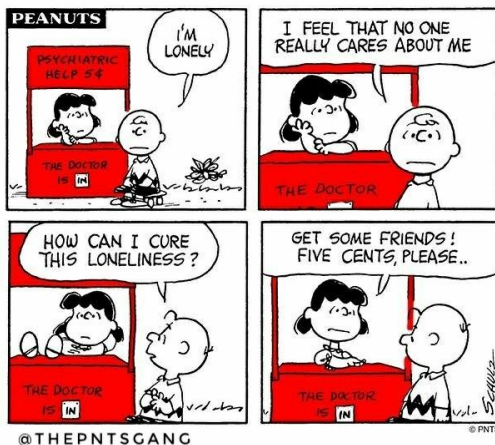


Each week our churches are full of lonely people. They're dying inside from loneliness. We can assume they come to church because they love God or want to connect to Him, but tied to that is a desire to connect to others. Yet too often we feel we were out-and-out friendly because we smiled, shook their hand, and said, "Glad you're here"—right before we quickly moved to the next person, smiled, shook their hand, and said, "Glad you're here."

They also sit in our Bible study groups. Lonely. There is a desire to bond with other people, to build a connection. The purpose of group Bible study is to learn and grow in Christ **together**.

The *Psychology Today* article closed with several practical tips that will contribute to the cure for loneliness:

- Do talk to strangers
- Give a conversation seven minutes
- Schedule face time (not just social media)
- Meet your neighbors
- Reach out and literally touch someone



But Jennifer Latson's cover article in the March 2018 issue of *Psychology Today* paints a different picture. According to Latson, the plight of loneliness is reaching epidemic proportions, and some researchers want to treat it as a disease.

A disease? Perhaps. Loneliness can contribute to a whole catalog of health problems. "Lonely people are more likely than the nonlonely to die from cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory illness, and gastrointestinal causes—essentially, everything." She goes so far as to consider loneliness deadly.

This is where Lucy got it wrong in the Peanuts comic strip. Loneliness isn't simply cured by being around people. People with a few friends can be quite content, while others with a large number in their social circles can experience great loneliness. Married people may have a spouse, but they can still suffer from feeling constantly lonely.

What matters is the *quality* of those relationships—and **this is where the church can step in.**

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Psychology Today is a purely secular magazine, yet these tips are spot on for what the body of Christ do—and should—do. Are we?

What will you do this week to move beyond the superficial and get to know the person who sits down the pew from you? Who knows, maybe they're dying to know you.

- *"Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well (1 Thess. 2:7-8).*
- *"Not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).*