

What To Do When You Feel Left Out Or Lonely

By Kay Harms



I am fifty-*ahem* and just figured something out in recent years. For most of my life I mistakenly assumed that everyone else – yes, I mean EVERYONE else – always felt included, involved, engaged, and invited . . . and I alone did not. It seemed to me that everyone else – yes, I mean EVERYONE else – had places to be, friends to gather with, conversations to finish, phone calls to return, texts to answer, and calendars full of meet-ups. And I alone did not.

Yeah, I know. I'm really ten inside.

The truth is we all have empty spaces. We all get lonely occasionally. Each of us feels excluded or forgotten sometimes. We have vacuums in our days, long stretches of solitude that suck us into pity parties if we're not careful.

Be careful.

I've discovered that when I desperately try to fill that vacuum – those lonely moments and empty places – with human relationships, I sometimes drink in too fully. Loneliness and great expectations have led me to gulp up friendship in unhealthy doses. As a result I've occasionally been too dependent, jealous, possessive, or controlling of my friends.

But when I drink fully of the living water Jesus graciously offers me in relationship with Him (John 4:7-24), I find myself satisfied but not bloated. Instead of grabbing hold and choking on what someone else can give me, I flourish as an individual and easily give my friends freedom and grace. Jesus alone can fully and safely satisfy my cravings for companionship, inclusion, and intimacy.

Friendship is not the remedy for loneliness. Friendship is the fruit of loving unselfishly and liberally. If we enter into relationships with other people to ease our own loneliness or fill our empty spaces, we neglect to *bring* anything into the friendship . . . other than our neediness. Instead, I find I'm healthier and happier when I focus on what I can *offer* my friend instead of what I can gain from her. It's in the giving that I find more joy.

We need each other. So often we feel alone. And we feel alone in our struggles as well as our joys. We long to share both with someone who cares. But maybe the key is not reaching out or hunting for someone to meet that need in us. Instead, maybe the safer, richer, healthier approach is to reach out and give . . . whatever you have.

If you're feeling lonely, left out, or forgotten today, I encourage you to take those aching needs to Jesus. Tell Him how you feel. In fact, *feel* those emotions fully in the safety of His presence. Allow Him to fill your empty spaces, to be your sweet companion, and to satisfy your deepest desires.

Then let your loneliness draw you out. Look beyond your own needs to the hurts and struggles and weariness and celebrations of your friends. Ask God to show you how you can meet a simple need today. Don't have a friend? Then reach out to someone with love and compassion and grace . . . and you'll make one.

When we worry that our loneliness will stick and stay, we fear that it will become a label that will eventually define us. But when we see loneliness as a temporary emotion meant to draw us up then out, we are freed from our fears and loosed to love. Next time you're lonely, let it draw you out.

As a pastor's wife, Kay Harms has moved from Georgia to Texas to Arizona over the years. She frequently speaks at Christian women's conferences and has authored several Bible studies. Kay blogs at KayHarms.com.

Lonely is not a permanent label meant to define me.
Lonely is a temporary emotion meant to draw me up, then out.
- Kay Harms

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Lifelines for the Lonely

By Susan Miller



Loneliness may be the hardest thing you're dealing with when you've been uprooted from the life you've known. If we were sitting on my porch, I would share with you some of the things that became a lifeline in my loneliness:

Refocus on God. Take your eyes off yourself and turn your eyes to Jesus. It's easy to lose focus on what's most important—God—and, instead, be focusing on your circumstances. We focus on filling our life with people, things, or activities to escape from loneliness. The emptiness you feel should first be filled by God; then He will bring the right people and activities in your life to ease the loneliness.

Take this lonely time to focus on God's word. Look to Him to fill all the lonely places and spaces in your heart and mind. Through this, you will begin to build a deeper relationship with God. Then, you will come out the other side of loneliness a stronger, more confident, and fulfilled woman.

Listen to God. God may be using this time in your life and the pain of your loneliness to get your full attention and draw you closer to Him.

Listen ... what is God trying to tell you?

Talk to God. There's nothing like a one-on-one conversation with Jesus! Eyes open or closed, head bowed or looking straight ahead. Pray silently or speak aloud.

I talk out loud to Jesus just as I do with a best friend—because that's what He is. Anywhere, anytime works for me. It's a relief to know I can be honest, tell Jesus how I really feel, and know He still loves me. And you know what? If I take a deep breath every now and then, I can catch His response.

Rest in God. I have often thought that the only time I'm not too busy, too scheduled, and too committed, is after I move. For many of us, that pocket of time is like a clock that's waiting to be wound up. Until our life starts ticking again, we should take that time to rest; yet we often waste it by being frantic about our loneliness.

Wait on God. It's hard to wait, isn't it? You may already be tired of waiting to fit in, waiting to make friends, waiting to feel at home, waiting to be included, waiting to be accepted, *waiting for the loneliness to go away.*

Waiting on God is hard sometimes. We don't understand why we have to wait so long for all the pieces of life to come together again. Trust me, they will come together—in God's timing, not ours. But it's during the waiting, during the space between now and then, that much is learned. While I waited, He taught me about *trust* and a whole lot about *patience*.

Reach out to others. Are you waiting for other people to reach out to you in your loneliness? For all the times people have reached out to me, there have been just as many times they haven't. I can choose to feel sorry for myself and indulge in a lot of self-pity. But that's not the answer. The answer is to stop thinking about me and start thinking about them. I have learned to pursue others, to make it happen, to jump in, to just do it. That's not easy for shy women to do, but it's one of the conditions of starting over. You've just got to grit your teeth and take the first step.

Adapted from *After the Boxes Are Unpacked* by Susan Miller. Available at JustMovedShop.com.



The answer to our loneliness is love — not our finding someone to love us, but our surrendering to the God who has always loved us with an everlasting love. Loving Him is then expressed in a happy and full-hearted pouring out of ourselves in love to others.
- Elisabeth Elliot

Be patient. When you feel lonely, stay with your loneliness. Avoid the temptation to let your fearful self run off. Let it teach you its wisdom; let it tell you that you can live instead of just surviving. Gradually you will become [whole], and you will find that Jesus is living in your heart and offering you all you need. - Henri Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love*

Where Is Your Focus?

By Ann Kelley

You've been uprooted from your home and plopped down in a new town. Friendships, invitations to dinner, laughter over an inside joke - all seem to happen for everyone else, but not for you.

Enter Facebook (or the social media *du jour*). You're just a click away from entering into your old friends' lives and the familiar sights of the home you left behind. You open Facebook to find a picture of your best friends together or a photo of your mom and sister at your favorite cafe. Then you see a photo of the gang getting together for the monthly softball game. Every image is filled with smiles, laughter, fun.

What you don't see is the argument that happened on the way to the softball game or the awkward silence that preceded the selfie. Most often, Facebook and Instagram are fairytale facades of life in the ideal.

Even more important, as you focus on what you're missing, discontentment settles in and you may miss opportunities available right in front of you! Research has been done to prove this. "The problem with FOMO [fear of missing out] is the individuals it impacts are looking outward instead of inward," says Darlene McLaughlin, M.D., assistant professor at the Texas A&M Health Science Center College of Medicine and a psychiatry and behavioral health specialist with Texas A&M Physicians. "When you're so tuned in to the 'other,' or the 'better' (in your mind), you lose your authentic sense of self. **This constant fear of missing out means you are not participating as a real person in your own world.**"

Is social media stirring up discontentment in you? Is your focus on what and who you left behind? **Make the choice today to be present.** Focus on your life right here, right now. Are you getting social media notifications on your phone? Turn them off! Use these outlets for important connections, but handle them wisely. Guard against the allure that life is so much better somewhere else.



Help Your Kids Make Friends

By Susan Miller

In your eagerness to help your children make friends, remember the things you cannot do, as well as the things you can do, in the process. You cannot speed up time, and it takes time for everyone to settle in, adjust, and make friends.

What you can do, though, is offer your reassurance and some simple suggestions for how to begin the friend-making process. You can pray faithfully and be there to listen and encourage. You can refresh basic social skills, such as how to start conversations, as well as build up your child's self-confidence through affirmation and praise.

Each child's friend-making ability is unique by age and personality. Since **preschool children** don't know how to introduce themselves, you need to get them together, teach them each other's names, and play games with them. This helps them become comfortable with each other.

If your children are **between the ages of six and 12**, try to get them involved in after-school groups such as a youth group at church, Scouts, or organized sports. Most of the time, elementary-age children lack the social skills to make a stranger feel welcome, so the new child is often left out. Don't completely rely on the playground at recess or school activities to be the source of friendships. Invite someone your child has met to come over for a visit. Often that one-on-one time will be the beginning of a new friendship.

Teenagers are a whole different story. They are at an age when they are forming an identity apart from the family and with their friends. Moving means that ties to a teen peer group will be broken and your teenager is once again dependent on the family as the only support system. Sparks can fly along with the ebb and flow of emotions. Teens can become rebellious and resentful and the whole family can feel the effects of their outbursts.

Be intentional about making your house "the hangout" for your teen's friends. Teenagers want a safe place to be, unconditional love, acceptance, a listening ear - and food.



Adapted from *But Mom, I Don't Want to Move!* by Susan Miller. Available at JustMovedShop.com.





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