

Hope...for the uprooted woman

Longing to Belong by Ann Kelley



The world can be a lonely place. Especially if you've recently moved. But loneliness—the lack of a sense of belonging—is just as rampant among those who have not moved.

A study in 1985 revealed that most Americans claimed to have three close confidants – “People with whom one feels comfortable sharing a personal problem.” In a subsequent study 20 years later, that number dropped to just one confidant and a whopping 25% of Americans said they had no one to confide in.¹

Results from a 2018 U.S. survey of 20,000 people 18 and older are alarming²:

- Nearly half of Americans report sometimes or always feeling alone or left out.
- One in four Americans (27%) rarely or never feel as though there are people who really understand them.
- Two in five (43%) sometimes or always feel that their relationships are not meaningful and that they are isolated from others.
- One in five rarely or never feel close to people (20%) or feel like there are people they can talk to (18%).
- 48% of single parents report being lonely.
- Only 50% of Americans have meaningful in-person social interactions on a daily basis.

Multiple studies make it undeniably clear that meaningful connection with others contributes to health, happiness, and longevity. Social connection strengthens our immune system, helps us recover from disease, and may lengthen life span. Those who are more connected have lower rates of anxiety and depression, have higher self-esteem, are more empathetic, and more trusting and cooperative.

Many blame social media for contributing to loneliness. Studies suggest that using social media apps to keep in touch with friends can contribute to your sense of belonging. But spending hours on social media can also become a substitute for real connection and contribute to feelings of loneliness and inadequacy.

Young adults with heavy use of social media platforms—two hours a day—are twice as likely to experience social anxiety. Researchers also found that participants who are online most frequently—defined as 50 or more times per week—are three times as likely to feel isolated as those who use social media fewer than nine times a week. This phenomenon isn't just affecting young adults. Older adults who are stuck in their routines and feel unable to discover new ways to find and foster friendships offline suffer as well.³

If you hunger for a sense of belonging, keep reading. There is encouragement in these pages.

If you are contentedly established in a meaningful, supportive crew of family and/or friends, keep reading. Your eyes may be opened to recognize those who are longing to belong and to reach out in friendship and compassion.

¹<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/000312240607100301?source=mfc&rss=1>

²<https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/>

³<https://www.psychom.net/how-social-media-increases-loneliness>

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You never know when you'll make a good friend.



Bloom provides inspiration as you seek to grow and thrive during times of life change.

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Pancakes With a Purpose

Curtis Kimball had been living in San Francisco for a year and a half when his wife told him he needed to make friends. Because of the pandemic and being relatively new in his community, Curtis was feeling disconnected and finding it difficult to meet people. "I just don't know how grown-ups make friends."

So, he decided to make pancakes.

He typed notices on sheets of paper and taped them to telephone poles around the neighborhood. His message: **"My wife says I'm getting weird. She says I need to make friends. So I'm making pancakes."** He included his address, time, and other details and added, "Come by and say hi and have some pancakes with me."



The day of the pancake breakfast more than 75 neighbors showed up outside his home. It turns out, many of his neighbors were craving connection too. There was a collective sense of gratitude for an opportunity to get to know others in the neighborhood and to feel a sense of togetherness.

The next month, he did it again! His Twitter posts say it all . . .



"A month ago I had a ridiculous, silly, simple idea: I could make my neighborhood a better place, AND make some new friends just by making pancakes in front of my house for anyone who came by to hang out.



"I hung fliers all around the neighborhood and hilariously, people showed up! And the vibes were incredible! I had kind of accidentally stumbled on something. A lot of people were hungry to connect with their neighbors and share smiles and laughter and joy.



So I prepared as many pancakes as I possibly could. I hung up the fliers again and hoped for the best. I didn't know if anyone would come, but I thought maybe....



AND THEY DID! The line stretched down the block and around the corner. In 2 hours, myself, my mother-in-law and some friends I used to work with made over 700 pancakes for 300 brand new friends. It was one of the most incredible experiences of my life.



The joy, the laughter, the gratitude, the kindness was all overwhelming (as was the smell of pancakes). Not to be a softy, but I got a little misty a few times as every person thanked me for what to them felt like the perfect antidote at the perfect time after a rough 2 years.



San Franciscans have my undying gratitude for some of the most fun times of my life. Everyone who came was a little more wind in my sails as we all start to put our world back together. So go forth! Make friends! Reach out! Give love and receive it!
(@cremebruleecart)

What about you?

What will you do to foster connection in your life and in your neighborhood? Don't wait for someone else to act. It may never happen. Be proactive and go after the community connection you want to have. Be open to the people you meet and don't be quick to judge. Remember, you're not the only one longing for belonging.

Essentials for the Good Life

A 75-year-long study reveals what makes for health and happiness

In 1938, in the midst of the depression, The Harvard Study of Adult Life was created with an ambitious plan to track 724 young men, year after year, to learn about the impact of life choices on their health and well-being. It may well be the longest study of adult life that's ever been conducted and it continues to this day. About 60 of the original 724 men are still alive and participating in the study.

The participants were recruited from two groups: sophomores at Harvard College (the college was entirely male at the time) and teenage boys from Boston's poorest neighborhoods living in tenements, many without hot and cold running water.

Every two years, over the next 75 years, the men were sent a set of questions about their lives and were interviewed in their homes – all meticulously recorded on film. The researchers were given access to their medical records, drew their blood, scanned their brains, and talked to their wives and children. Eventually, the wives were asked to participate.

Their conclusion? Good relationships keep us happier and healthier.

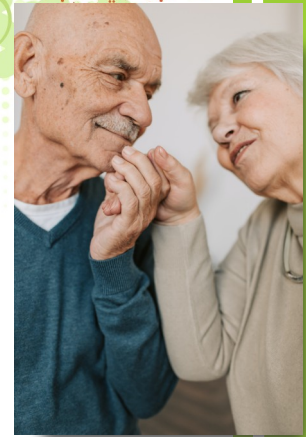
There were three big lessons that emerged:

1. Social connections are really good for us and loneliness kills. People who are more socially connected to family, friends, and community are happier, physically healthier, and live longer than people who are less well connected.
2. It's not just the number of friends you have and it's not whether or not you're in a committed relationship, but it's the quality of your close relationships that matters. The fact is, good, warm relationships are protective. When participants were in their 50s, it wasn't the cholesterol levels that predicted their health as they grew older, but rather how satisfied they were in their relationships. Those who were most satisfied in their relationships at age 50 were the healthiest at age 80.
3. Good relationships protect our brains. Those who are in relationships where they feel they can count on the other person in times of need, stay mentally sharper. These secure relationships can even have their share of conflict, but as long as they feel they can count on the other when times are rough, those conflicts don't have an adverse effect on mental acuity.

These lessons were true for both the Harvard men and the inner-city participants.

The researchers' conclusion: "Close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives. Those ties protect people from life's discontents, help to delay mental and physical decline, and are better predictors of long and happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes."

www.ted.com/talks/robert_waldinger_what_makes_a_good_life_lessons_from_the_longest_study_on_happiness/
news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/04/over-nearly-80-years-harvard-study-has-been-showing-how-to-live-a-healthy-and-happy-life/



Six Tips for Making Friends

- Smile.
- Make eye contact. Many people feel unseen.
- Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves. Follow up with questions.
- Remember the person's name.
- Lend a hand when you perceive a need.
- Bring your authentic self. Don't pretend to be someone you're not.

Two Can Stand Back-to-Back and Conquer by Jesse Prentiss



I had arrived at the mall an hour earlier than the shoe store actually opened. Fortunately there was a playland so I settled in to let the kids play and pass the hour. I made eye contact and exchanged a smile with another mom a few times before she moved closer to engage in small talk.

I had recently moved to the area and was lonely. She had recently become a stay-at-home mom and was lonely. We hesitantly exchanged emails. I feared I was coming across desperate and she worried she seemed like a stalker.

Individually we had been praying for a friend. We each needed someone to have our back as we battled the recent changes in our lives. God moved us together in a weird, but wonderful “only-God” way, so we knew our meeting was totally from Him.

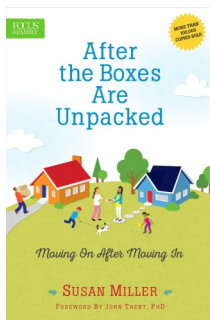
I shudder to think of the loss my pride could have caused me that day had I not had the faith to trust God’s leading to this new friend. Rachael and I joined a Bible study together and had each other’s back. We became better wives, better moms, and better women together.

So if you are feeling lonely and unraveled, start with prayer. Then keep your eyes open for His provision. No matter how unusual it looks, trust that He will provide for your needs in that wonderful “only-God” way.

*“A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but **two can stand back-to-back and conquer**. Three are even better, for a triple braided cord is not easily broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12).*

God promises to provide for our needs—even our loneliness. When Jesus is that third person in a relationship it strengthens a friendship into a bond that is not easily broken even under the strain of time, distance, and the daily challenges of life.

Join an online or in-person After the Boxes Are Unpacked group!



When you’re new to your community, it’s common to feel disconnected and isolated without local friendships and support.

After the Boxes Are Unpacked groups get the conversation going about emotional realities, practical ideas, and paths to spiritual growth as you begin a new stage of life in a new town. Going through the study with others who have been uprooted by a move and understand what you’re going through can become a lifeline.

Groups are meeting throughout the U.S. and among the U.S. military around the world. Go to justmoved.org/after-the-boxes-study to learn more. Contact Just Moved Ministry to ask about a group in your area or online.

