



# FRIENDSHIP

LESSON 2

THE SILENT EQUALIZER: LONELINESS

HeartLine  
CROSSLINE COMMUNITY CHURCH









# Get Healthy: Friendship

---

## Lesson Two- The Silent Equalizer: Loneliness

### Look Back: 10 Minutes

1. **Review the working definition of a good friend. Did this definition change your perspective on friendship in any way? If so, how?**
2. **In what ways would you like to see improvement in your friendships?**
3. **How did you seek to be a better friend this week?**
4. **What practical step did you take to increase your level of connectedness to spiritually, emotionally, and relationally healthy people?**

### Look Ahead: 50 Minutes

Recently, I read a statistic that made my mouth drop open. Literally. Drop open.

*One third of women are more afraid of loneliness than of receiving a cancer diagnosis.*

Though the statistic shocked me, the more I thought about it, the more it made sense.

According to a recent survey, nearly *half* of us feel more disconnected, alone, and isolated than we did just a few years ago. Loneliness has tripled since 1985, when 10% of Americans said they had no one they could fully confide in. Today the number is 25%. This means for every four women, one of them feels she has *no one* with whom she can truly be herself: No one with whom she can talk about deep issues. No one to help her process difficulties. No one with whom she can simply be real.

It's not that women don't have relationships. We do.

We just don't have friends.

At least, not the kind our hearts yearn for, or the kind our souls require for emotional, spiritual and relational health.

And here's the thing: if you do have a friend in whom you can fully confide, in all likelihood, the gal sitting next to you, does not.

- 1. What are your initial reactions to the statistics listed above? Do they resonate with you?**

**Which of the following factors have *personally* affected your friendships, or sense of connectedness?**

- a. Cell phone/Computer**
- b. Social media**
- c. Busyness**
- d. Work/commute**
- e. Change of city, job, home or church**
- f. Status (divorce, marriage, single, children, no children)**
- g. Other**

If there's any good news in these statistics, it's knowledge that we aren't the only one who struggles with loneliness. At some point in life, everyone feels lonely. Let me say that again, if only because I know how lonely loneliness feels:

We. All. Feel. Lonely. Sometimes.

Why take the time to repeat this? Because **there's only one thing worse than being lonely: thinking you're the only one who is.**

So, how do we overcome loneliness? Let's discover how.

- 2. Read Romans 16:3-16 and note everyone Paul names. How many did you count? \_\_\_\_\_ (Hint: Keep you Bible open to Romans 16, because we'll come back to it later)**

So, right about now, I know what you're thinking: *where in the world is she going with this? This is just a bunch of hard to pronounce names.* I know. I get it.

At first glance this passage of scripture seems like a yawn fest, at best. But hang on, because this little (seemingly) irrelevant passage of scripture holds nuggets of wisdom about how to overcome loneliness, develop friends, and keep friends over the long haul.

- a. **Look more closely at the comments Paul made about individuals.**
  - **Are the comments individual? Give an example from the text.**
  - **Are the comments personal? Give an example from the text.**
  - **Are the comments encouraging? Give an example from the text.**
  - **Are the comments sincere? What makes you think so?**

Consider this, Paul was a church planter by vocation. This means Paul started churches, stayed a short while to see the church established, then moved on to plant other churches. His life could have *easily* been filled with surface friendships and distant acquaintances. Paul could have been downright lonely. But despite obvious obstacles, Paul found a way to make, keep, and nourish his relationships. And Paul didn't have the luxury of cell phones or Internet! How did he do it?

Paul was intentional about his friendships.

**One of the biggest mistakes women make when it comes to friendship is the belief that friendship “just happens”.**

Friendship requires intentionality. Overcoming loneliness requires intentionality. It's just a fact.

### **3. Which of the following stops you from being intentional in friendship?**

- **Busyness**
- **Family commitments**
- **Fear**
- **Spouse doesn't want me to spend time with friends**
- **Habit/Laziness (i.e. it's just easier to stay home and watch Netflix)**
- **Procrastination**
- **Don't know who I'd reach out to, or how**
- **Past hurt**
- **I'm not a good initiator**

Some of us, by nature, are initiators. Some of us though, are not; we are responders. Recently, I came across an eye-opening insight about friendship: **Mutuality does not mean equal initiation.** In her article, *“Five Biggest Mistakes Women Make in Friendship”*, Shasta Nelson, M. Div. writes:

“Oh-so-many friendships never get off the ground due to the fear in us that whispers, *I invited her last time, the ball is in her court now*. So not true. We all have strengths to give to our friendships, and initiation and planning are just that — a strength that we all have in varying degrees. I never think, *Oh I had them over last time... it's their turn*. I think, *Oh I want to see them again, let me email them to see if they can come over!* And they reciprocate in the friendships in plenty of other ways...Mutuality is important. But mutuality is not 50/50 in each task, but whether we both are contributing to the friendship overall.”

**4. Discuss your thoughts about the above paragraph.**

- a. **Are you primarily an initiator or a responder?**
  
- b. **If you an initiator, how does this free you from unrealistic expectations about friendship?**
  
- c. **If you are a responder, what responsibility do you have to bring mutuality to the friendship?**
  
- d. **Women who have healthy friendships understand how the failure to initiate and/or respond can deal a deathblow to friendship, which results in the very thing we long to avoid--loneliness. Brainstorm a few easy ways you can (and will!) be intentional and responsive in your friendships this week.**

**5. Let's return to Romans 16:3-16, and explore it a little further. Picture yourself sitting in the early Roman church the day Paul's letter was read aloud. Suppose you heard your name highlighted by Paul. For example, "Greet (your name), who....." How would you feel?**

Think of Paul's personal greetings to his far-away friends as "touch points". In business, a touch point is any way a consumer can interact with a business, whether person-to-person, through a website, an app, or any form of communication. But touch points can be relational, too! Touch points keep people connected.

**Connection is the antidote to loneliness.**



People who make and maintain friends have mastered the art of touch points: relationally connecting with people in a way that communicates value and appreciation. Initiating and responding helps us *make* friends. Touch points help us *keep* friends.

**Relational touch points contain these four elements:**

- 1) They are individual
- 2) They are personal
- 3) They are encouraging, inspiring, or informational
- 4) They are sincere

**6. Let's consider how each element of a touch point relates to us, and our friendships.**

**1) A Touch Point is Individual:**

- **How do you feel when another woman acknowledges you, individually?**
- **How do you feel when you are overlooked?**
- **How good are you at making individuals feel included, valued, and accepted?**
- **How can you improve?**

**2) A Touch Point is Personal:**

- **How do you feel when another woman remembers or asks about something personal?**
- **How do you feel if a friend forgets or dismisses something personal?**
- **How good are you at remembering to ask about important personal things with your friends?**
- **How can you improve?**

**3) A Touch Point is Encouraging:**

- **How do you feel when you receive encouragement?**
- **How do you feel if you don't receive encouragement?**
- **How freely do you encourage other women?**
- **How can you improve?**

#### **4) A Touch Point is Sincere**

- **How do you feel when a woman is genuinely interested in you?**
- **What makes your insincerity radar go up?**
- **What hidden agendas have you had in friendship? (Be honest!)**
- **How can you improve?**

How does this discussion of Paul, his friends, and touch points relate to overcoming loneliness? I'm so glad you asked!

First, many of us long to develop meaningful friendships, but get caught in the trap of believing it takes too much time.

- 7. Consider the length of Paul's comments to his friends in Rome. Were they short or lengthy? \_\_\_\_\_ How can you stay connected with friends, in brief, easy-to-manage ways?**

Second, when we're caught in the trap of loneliness, we're ripe for some pretty unhealthy ways of coping.

- 8. Below you'll find a list of the most common unhealthy ways women cope with loneliness. Circle any that relate to you (now or in the past).**

- **Expect others to reach out to me, and stay isolated until they do**
- **Try to reach out once, but if it doesn't work, quit.**
- **Blame myself for being unlovable**
- **Stay home and eat a pint of ice cream or whole bag of chips**
- **Become friends with whoever shows an interest in me--even if they aren't the best influence**
- **Get angry about, "all those cliquey women!"**
- **Stay busy "doing", to the point I no longer feel I need friends**
- **Feel so needy I'm awkward around others**
- **Cry, become depressed, negative or hopeless**

Loneliness is a hard place to live. In fact, it can be downright painful. There's really only one thing worse than loneliness: the self-absorption that often accompanies it.

Loneliness tends to make us self-focused. And let's just be honest here, no one can have healthy friendships as long as they stay self-obsessed. Ironically, the solution to loneliness is to take the focus off ourselves, and place it onto others.

Kind of like what Paul did. Oh, wait...*exactly* what Paul did.

The beauty of this sentiment is that it works equally well for everyone: introverts and extroverts; those of us who feel socially awkward, and those of us who feel socially adept.

Is it scary to reach out to others? Sometimes. Will it make you feel vulnerable to be the one who encourages, or the one who seeks to include? Maybe. Can you get hurt if you seek to be sincere? Yep.

Friendship is not risk-free. But the alternative--a life devoid of true friendship--isn't risk-free either. In fact, isolation and loneliness put women at greater risks, not less.

**9. Before we close, let's turn our attention once again back to Paul. Read Romans 16:17-19 (and get ready to have your mind blown!)**

- a. **What do these verses tell you about the reality of unhealthy people?**
  
- b. **In verse 17, Paul mentions two distinct qualities to help us identify unhealthy people. What are they? Fill in the blanks below.**
  - **Those who cause \_\_\_\_\_.**
  - **Those who \_\_\_\_\_.**
  
- c. **Considering our definition of a good friend, (one who propels me to be the best version of myself--the one God had in mind when He created me) discuss why, and how, these two types of people are unhealthy friends.**
  
- d. **According to verse 17, what two ways does Paul tell his friends in Rome to handle "those who cause divisions and put obstacle in your way..."?**
  
- e. **What does this teach you about how to respond to unsafe friends in your life *right now*?**

Loneliness. We all face it at some point. But now we have the tools to handle it in a healthy way.

And all it took was a closer look at a few "hellos" to people with funny names.

## **Life Application:**

- 1. Take time to review the four components of touch points. Pick one touch point you will focus on improving this week. Be intentional, and be ready to share the results with your group next week.**
- 2. Friendship requires initiation and response. Identify any ways in which your lack of initiation has hindered your ability to make friends. Write it down in the space below. What will you do to overcome this barrier?**
- 3. Identify any way your lack of responding has hindered your ability to make friends. Write it down in the space below. What will you do to overcome this barrier?**
- 4. If you have unhealthy, unsafe friends in your life, prayerfully consider how God wants you to handle these unsafe friends. Then, do whatever God tells you to do!**

## **Optional: Further Reading, Reflection and Bible Study**

---

- 1. We all feel lonely sometimes, but the truth is, we are never really alone. Read Psalm 139 slowly. Savor each line. Write down all the ways God is with you.**
- 2. Jesus understands our loneliness because He experienced it, too, He comforts us through His continual presence with us. Read Hebrews 13:5. How does this truth comfort you?**
- 3. Memorize Hebrews 13:5b.**