

INTRO

- You move to a new city. What are the ways you would go about making friends?
- In a technologically connected world, why do you think loneliness has increased?
- What is loneliness?

REFLECT

There are at least 3 dimensions to loneliness.

1. SOCIAL ISOLATION

When we think of loneliness, we typically think of social isolation. It is an epidemic and loneliness has been called the "greatest tragedy of the developed world".

The good news is God knows our need for community:

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." (Gen 2:18)

God sets the lonely in families... (Ps 68:6 NIV)

Qu: Why do you think God declares loneliness 'not good'?

2. EMOTIONAL DISCONNECTION

When we are lonely, we experience emotional disconnection. In one study, emotional disconnection was revealed to be *the* greatest of marital problems.

When we experience relational hurt (and every person can relate to that), it leads us to self-protect (withdraw or build walls), and that in turns makes it near impossible for us to receive/give love — the thing we need most.

Qu: What are harmful ways we self-protect when we are hurt relationally? What are helpful ways we can work through our relational hurt?

Social isolation and emotional disconnection are difficult in and of themselves. But they point to

something else. When we trace loneliness to its source, the bible tells us it is due to our spiritual separation.

3. SPIRITUAL SEPARATION

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. (Gen 3:7)

There is an order to healthy relationships and it begins with our relationship with God. This also explains our #1 source of relational hurt: unrealistic expectations.

Qu: What examples are there where unhealthy expectations of a person lead to relational hurt?

The bible calls this idolatry — we expect someone to fulfill something within us that only God can. But when we have God as the source in our lives, then right expectations lead to relational satisfaction.

Qu: Are people a channel or replacement for God's love? What's the difference?

God is not a cosmic force or a distant deity; He is a loving Father who desires intimacy with us. His invitation:

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." (Rev 3:20)

God's love heals the root of loneliness; not just the symptoms.

Qu: How can you apply this to your life right now?

PRAY

- Pray for one another.