

# Calling Time on Loneliness

Richard Taylor (Linking Lives), January 2021



LINKING LIVES UK

## All the Lonely People

Over half (51%) of all people aged 75 and over live alone.<sup>1</sup> In England, the proportion of people aged 50 and over who say they are often lonely hasn't improved for at least a decade. If this issue is not tackled, our ageing population means that by 2026, there will be over 2 million older people who are often lonely.<sup>2</sup>

LONELINESS IS  
CONSIDERED MORE  
HARMFUL THAN NOT  
EXERCISING AND TWICE AS  
HARMFUL AS OBESITY<sup>3</sup>

There is increasing evidence of the negative impact that loneliness and isolation can have on quality of life. Recent reports highlight the effects of loneliness on biological, physical, and mental health and one found that there was a 50% increased likelihood of survival for those with strong social connections. Having weak social connections carried a health risk equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day or being an alcoholic.<sup>3</sup>

## God of the Lonely

There is an astonishing moment in the creation narrative when God reflects on His handiwork and admits that something he has done is not quite right; it is incomplete - *"It is not good for the man to be alone"*. As a result, the Creator sets to work again and redeems Adam's loneliness through the provision of human company in the person of Eve, *"I will make a helper suitable for him."*<sup>4</sup>

This powerful insight into the heart and mind of God indicates several things: We are designed to enjoy and thrive in company with one another as well as in fellowship with Him; the issue of loneliness is of great concern to the Father; and each one of us can be a Divine provision to another's isolation. God's passion and actions to address loneliness is clear in scripture, being praised as, *"A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families"*<sup>5</sup>. This same emphasis is cited as an exemplar of the sort of church God desires, *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress"*<sup>6</sup>.

WHEN WE GIVE  
ATTENTION AND PRIORITY  
TO PRACTICALLY  
COMBATTING LONELINESS  
AND CARING FOR THE  
VULNERABLE, WE HIT THE  
SWEET SPOT OF RELIGIOUS  
EXPRESSION

It is poignant that from the anguish of the cross, Christ made practical arrangements for his own mother. At creation, His Father addressed isolation through the provision of human-to-human compassion and company, and here Jesus models to us the same, timeless approach... *"When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home"*<sup>7</sup>

## Two's Company: Linking Lives

Linking Lives UK is a Christian charity dedicated to reaching some of the most socially isolated older people in the UK. We do this by supporting Churches and Christian agencies set up befriending projects, usually through home visits. In recent months our resource and focus has moved to telephone befriending as a great way for churches to respond to heightened loneliness and isolation during the COVID pandemic...



Two's Company provides a safe and effective way to reach those in need of friendship. The model is a development of our proven home visiting approach that has been used since 2012. It enables volunteers to be in regular contact by telephone with those in the community who are most at risk of loneliness or social isolation. We offer a clear framework for befriending, ongoing support to coordinators and a variety of resources for local churches to use. In addition, comprehensive training is provided by video conferencing to coordinators to then equip volunteers in the local church.

**Together, we can call time on loneliness.** If you'd like to receive our Two's Company publicity pack, please register on <https://linkinglives.uk/twos-company/>. Richard Taylor is in Devon and available to chat, answer questions and support churches set up befriending projects; you can email him on [richard@linkinglives.uk](mailto:richard@linkinglives.uk)

<sup>1</sup>ONS, 2010; <sup>2</sup>Age UK: All the Lonely People, Loneliness in later life (Sept 2018); <sup>3</sup>Smith TB, Layton JB (2010) Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review;

<sup>4</sup>Genesis 2:18 <sup>5</sup>Psalms 68:6; <sup>6</sup>James 1:27; <sup>7</sup>John 19:27; <sup>8</sup>