



Patrick Tomasso

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.

Psalms 25:16-18

Loneliness is an experience that we can all relate to, but almost 1 in 5 people in the UK often or always feel lonely. The figures are higher for the elderly and for young people. If you are lonely, it would seem, you are not alone but that is unlikely to provide much comfort. We are social creatures. We need to feel connected to others.

It is possible to feel lonely in a crowd, or in a marriage. It is equally possible to be alone and not to feel lonely. Feeling lonely and being alone are different things. Loneliness is more about the company that we would like to have and do not have, the discrepancy between the way things are and the way we would like them to be.

Enduring loneliness can be both a cause and a consequence of mental ill health. The Psalmist is lonely and afflicted, distressed, and troubled. In Psalm 25, loneliness is associated with troubles of the heart or, as we might say, depression and anxiety. Pain and trauma can create, and perpetuate, our feelings of loneliness. We can feel abandoned even when others are trying to show that they care. We may feel that others do not understand what we are going through.

The Psalmist turns to God for help, and asks that God will turn to him. Prayer is not a magic solution for loneliness. Nonetheless, like the Psalmist, we can be honest before God; there is no need to pretend. We turn to God for God's sake, not simply to ask him to fix things. God is always there, even if it does feel as though he has turned away. When feeling lonely, turning to God, and asking God to turn to you, is not a bad place to start.

A “Have a Go” habit: Prayers

- Photos of family and friends, and other reminders around the home, can trigger feelings of loneliness, but they can also be good prompts for prayer. They can remind us to write, or send a message, or make a telephone call. Imagine that God also gets a copy of the letter/message, so that it becomes a part of your prayer.
- Pray for neighbours and for God's creation (and that we might all look after it better). If you can't get out, make use of magazines, TV, internet and other media to provide points of contact with the outside world. Use these things as reminders to pray for others.
- Try writing a letter to God – what do you want to say? What would you point to in your life? What would you ask, and what kind of answer would you like back?



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The *#FaithAndMentalHealth* reflections were written by Rev Prof Chris Cook. Ruth Rice developed the "Have a go" habits.

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