



SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

Meeting Segment Guide

Produced by the Policy and Advocacy Team
as part of the *Social Justice Stocktake*



Today we will be taking some time to look at the issues of social isolation and loneliness and spending some time in prayer for those who are affected.

The following resources have been created to assist you to run a 5-8 minute segment in your Corps' or mission expression Meeting, Team Meeting, ALT Meeting or any space where you gather with other people.

These resources are ready to print and use in your Meeting. Below you'll find:



TALKING POINTS



A PRAYER TIME GUIDE
(INCLUDING THREE WRITTEN PRAYERS)



EXTENDED SEGMENT OPTIONS



LINKS TO FURTHER RESOURCES

For further support in connecting with issues in your local community, contact us at policy.advocacy@salvationarmy.org.au



INTRODUCTION

Today we will be taking some time to look at the issues of social isolation and loneliness and spending some time in prayer for those who are affected.

As a faith community, we understand the importance of healthy relationships and a sense of belonging to personal wholeness and wellbeing. While we enjoy being a part of this faith community, this time of reflection challenges us to consider those who might be experiencing social isolation and loneliness around us.

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

- » **Social isolation and loneliness are not synonymous. Isolation is very often a precursor to loneliness,** however it is possible for a person to suffer from loneliness despite significant social contact, and it is also possible for a person who is socially isolated to not feel lonely.
- » **Social isolation and loneliness have been issues within Australia for many years but have become exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic,** as necessary rules for public safety have restricted social engagement. Recent studies suggest that 55% of Australians have experienced loneliness since the start of the pandemic in 2020ⁱ. This research showed that men were twice as likely to experience isolation and loneliness as women, and those who lived alone were significantly more likely to experience loneliness.
- » **Sometimes, disadvantage can contribute to social isolation and loneliness.** For example, someone experiencing poverty and financial hardship may struggle to join in social events, or a victim of domestic and family violence could be cut off from their networks of support. In other cases, people caught in gambling addiction may withdraw due to shame and financial hardship. There is a strong correlation between social isolation and loneliness, and depression and anxiety. Yet those who suffer from depression and anxiety also have a higher risk of becoming lonely due to their mental ill-health,

causing them to self-isolate and compound their distress. In these cases, the disadvantage contributes to a person's vulnerability to social isolation and loneliness.

- » **No matter how independent we may seem, humanity was made for community.** We are made in the image of God, who is Trinity – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. And so, it is not good for people to be alone, as we read in Genesis 2:18a and Ecclesiastes 4:7-12. We flourish in relationship with others. It's in this context that Paul writes about the Church being like a body (1 Corinthians 12:12-26) – each person different but belonging to each other and contributing to each other's wellbeing. No part of the body can say to another, "I don't need you," rather it's our interdependence (our connectedness, diversity and unity) that makes us healthy and functional.
- » **One of the powerful elements of Scripture is that it gives breath to the breadth of human experience, including social isolation and loneliness.** The laments of David's Psalms often reflect his sense of rejection and isolation (see Psalm 25:16-21 or Psalm 69:19-20), as does Elijah's complaint that, despite his ministry, he is the only one left and his life is in danger (1 Kings 19:10). Jesus' ministry was characterised by moving beyond social conventions to engage people who were experiencing social isolation due to race (Matthew 8:5-13), disease (Luke 17:11-19), marital status (John 4) or social connections (Matthew 9:9-13). At the centre of the Gospel is the open invitation: everyone is welcome, everyone can belong.
- » **Mark 5:1-20 is a demonstration of the Love of God.** Jesus and his followers travelled through a fierce storm to cross the Sea of Galilee, for the sake of a foreign, demon-possessed man. He was socially isolated due to the severity and violence of his

i. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/social-isolation-and-loneliness-covid-pandemic>



Talking Points



affliction. Jesus healed the man, setting him free from the torment he was experiencing, and encouraged the man to reconnect with his community. It is a story of restoration of body, mind, spirit and relationships.

- » **Mother Teresa once said: “The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for.** We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love”ⁱⁱ.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

- » **The Salvation Army Australia’s Vision Statement calls us to “transform Australia one life at a time with the love of Jesus.”** This is a summons for us each to consider how we may actively connect with people in our communities who are experiencing social isolation and loneliness, extending love, friendship and support in a way that brings healing and comfort. Who is God asking you to walk alongside today? Who can you intentionally show the love of Jesus to?

ii. Mother Teresa, A Simple Path (Ballantine Books, 1995)



Prayer Time



Play one of the following songs, and ask people to spend some time in silent, individual prayer while the song plays. Ask them to pray for a deeper awareness of peoples' loneliness and desire for connection, dedicating themselves again to walking "alongside others, transforming Australia one life at a time with the love of Jesus."

[Build My Life](#) – Housefires, Bethel

[Wanted](#) – Danny Gokey

[The Salvation Army Songbook No. 418 – People Need The Lord](#) ([lyrics](#))

Following this time of individual prayer, you may like to have three people read the below prayers. These prayers are printed on separate pages for ease of distribution to your readers.





Prayer Time



Prayer for the world

Lord,

As we gather in this way, we are mindful that so many people feel alone. There is a deep despair that accompanies our longing for true connection: to be seen, to be heard, to be loved, to belong.

We are reminded today that one of the first names you were given in the Bible was El-Roi – “God who sees me”. We remember that when Hagar felt socially isolated and forsaken in the desert, she found deep hope in knowing that you saw her. She was not alone.

As we hold this truth today, we ask that you bring comfort to those who, like Hagar, carry the distress of isolation and loneliness. For those who are isolated by illness, distance, poverty, violence, language constraints, disability, addiction, busyness or fear, we pray that they would truly know your presence today. May they feel your loving care and hope again.

God who sees us, El-Roi, hear our prayer.

Amen.



Prayer Time



Prayer for Australia

Lord,

In the Gospels, we see your incarnation: God with us. Thank you, Jesus, for choosing to share in our creatureliness. Through the writings of the Apostles, we see how you shared in some of the barren experiences of our humanity: of hunger, thirst, weariness, sadness and rejection. On the cross, Jesus, you cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,” experiencing the torment of isolation. You know its pain.

It is so precious to us that you are called, “Immanuel.” In our loneliness, we are deeply comforted by the promise that “God is with us.” We pray for our nation, mindful that we are rich in so many ways, while experiencing a deep poverty of connection and belonging. So many people feel alone and unwanted. We want Australians to know that they are not alone, and to be comforted by your loving presence.

Immanuel, hear our prayer.

Amen.



Prayer Time



Prayer for our community and our place in it

God,

We thank you that we can share together in community today. In the simple gestures of greeting and sharing our stories, in singing and praying, in serving and listening – you are present. We treasure your promise that “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there” (Matthew 18:20). We pause to acknowledge and enjoy our connection with you.

As your sent ones in the world, we pray that we would reflect your loving concern for every person we meet. Give us eyes to see the people who feel unseen, unheard and disconnected. Fill us with your love, ready to embrace, welcome and include. Give us wisdom, grace and courage to walk alongside those who struggle with social isolation and loneliness today.

Holy Spirit, Beautiful Comforter, hear our prayer,

Amen.



For an extended segment



If you would like to present an extended segment (that goes for longer than 10 minutes), here are some ideas that may take people deeper:

- » For a time of group discussion, you may like to read the following: <https://thenewdaily.com.au/opinion/2021/07/09/loneliness-epidemic-australia/> (or a similar article on loneliness in Australia)
- » Share with each other around the following questions:
 - How did social isolation impact you during the pandemic stay-at-home restrictions?
 - What contributes to social isolation in Australia?
 - What people groups are likely to experience social isolation and loneliness in our community?
 - What could a 'Minister for Loneliness' do for our community?
 - What have been your most meaningful experiences of community and connection over the past few years?
 - How can we actively include others that might be experiencing social isolation and loneliness in our mission expressions?
- » Use a video clip that tells stories of belonging in The Salvation Army:
 - » ['Salvo Stories – Darwin Corps'](#)
 - » ['Salvo Stories – Sydney Congress Hall Outreach'](#)
- » Prayer activities:
 - » Prayer Activity 1: Trace your hand on a piece of paper. Prayerfully consider people whom God brings to mind that may be experiencing loneliness; people you can reach out to with friendship and kindness. Write their names on the hand and ask God to show you how to connect with these people this week.
 - » Prayer Activity 2: Give everyone some post-it notes, to write down some of the contributing factors to people experiencing social isolation in their community (for example, illness, being new to the neighbourhood, experiencing anxiety, deaf). Share these post-it notes together so that you expand your thinking about what may lead to social isolation in your neighbourhood.



For an extended segment



» All-age game: Have everyone stand up. Call out a random number, and people must gather into groups of that number. Any remaining/ungrouped people must sit down. Call out another number, and then another, eliminating ungrouped people each round. The game is finished when only two participants remain upstanding. Have a chat around the following reflection questions:

- What did it feel like when you were looking for a group to join?
- How did it feel when you were unable to join a group and had to sit down?
- What kind of things may have made it harder to join in this game?

USEFUL SONGS:

[Build My Life](#) – Housefires, Bethel

[Wanted](#) – Danny Gokey

The Salvation Army Songbook No. 418 – People Need The Lord ([lyrics](#))

[No Outsiders](#) – Rend Collective

[Build Your Kingdom Here](#) – Rend Collective

The Salvation Army Songbook No. 1003 – O Lord, Whose Human Hands Were Quick ([lyrics](#))

The Salvation Army Songbook No. 1005 – Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You ([lyrics](#))

The Salvation Army Songbook No. 1013 – When I Needed A Neighbour ([lyrics](#))

USEFUL PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE:

- » Psalm 22
- » Ecclesiastes 4:7-12
- » Mark 5:1-20
- » 1 Corinthians 12:12-26



Further Resources



For more information on this issue, and for further resources, head to:

[‘Social Isolation and Loneliness’ by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#)

[‘Loneliness Study’ by the Australian Psychological Association](#)

[‘Campaign to End Loneliness’](#)

[‘Loneliness Explained’ by Harvard University](#)

If you'd like any further information on this resource please contact the Policy and Advocacy Team at policy.advocacy@salvationarmy.org.au

Every person can make a difference.

Together, we can make an even greater difference.



