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A universal school problem--and solution

Defeating Loneliness

By Tal D. Bonham

Loneliness has become an epidemic in our country. Everyone knows about this "absence of companionship or society." One doctor who defines *loneliness* as "pain turned inward" has concluded, "The rise of human loneliness may be one of the most serious sources of disease in the twentieth century."

A growing number of social scientists and mental-health professionals are now studying contemporary American loneliness. Some of the greatest contributing factors to loneliness in our country is the emphasis on the acquisition of material possessions and the desire for status. These materialistic goals discourage Americans from forming and maintaining relationships which tend to relieve loneliness.

More people live alone today than ever before--almost one-fourth of our population. In this group are a large number of people under 40 who, for a variety of reasons, have chosen not to marry. Others who live alone are divorced, separated, or widowed. Some experts estimate that, for every married couple in America, there's a single adult.

Loneliness among children and teenagers has caused a great deal of concern among child psychiatrists. The greatest contributing factor to loneliness among children and teenagers is the broken home, which causes so many children to be reared without both parents. Loneliness among youth is the greatest contributing factor to the increase of teenage suicide, which has risen 300% over the last 25 years.

Ordinary people cope with loneliness in ordinary ways. They depend on the radio and television for company. For companionship, they turn to soap operas that offer the illusion of involvement in other people's lives. Some people take tranquilizers and go to bed; others read or go to a movie or buy things they really don't need.

As a believer in Christ, I have found an answer to loneliness--practicing the presence of God. Every human being on the face of this earth lives in the presence of a holy, righteous, and loving God. This is a convicting truth because of our sins. But it's also a comforting truth because of our needs.

Life is full of shadows, but shadows are made because of the shining of the sun. In Christ, we have found the light that dispels the darkness of loneliness.

Illustration by Chris Swanda

