

WEEK 1

Beginning Our Journey Together

The British prime minister recently announced the creation of a position within her government to tackle the issue of loneliness. Why, you might ask, would they need to create a government position for loneliness? The reason is that loneliness has reached epidemic proportions in many western nations. Both the UK (where 9 million people report always or often feeling lonely according to one study) and the US (where reports by the American Psychological Association estimate 42.6 million adults over the age of 45 in the US suffer from chronic loneliness) are beginning to treat loneliness as a public health risk as dangerous to the nation's health as other epidemics like heart disease.

We have never in the history of the world had more ways to connect with others (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and insert whatever else is the latest and greatest form of social media) and yet we have fewer real, embodied friendships. Even with all of our follows, retweets, reposts, and likes we yearn for something deeper.

We are a lonely people living on a lonely planet.

In the passage from this week's sermon (Eccl. 4:9-12), the writer of Ecclesiastes looked squarely into the face of the loneliness of his own time and observed that, "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." A rope's strength lies in the twining and braiding together of the individual strands, so that together they give the rope a combined strength that allows it to be used in lifting and pulling weights and objects that are much larger and heavier than the rope itself. In a sense, you could say that the strength of the rope is that there are no lonely, isolated ropes. And this is true for the future of our church as we build together. We can only build a strong church if each of us are braided into a group of friends that make us stronger, more durable, and resilient because we are together.

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CHECKING IN

As we begin this journey together, take some time to check in as a group. You might choose to go around and introduce yourselves (particularly if there are new people), welcome new participants, and share what has happened in group members lives since you last met. You might also choose at this time to share new prayer requests and follow up on ones that have already been shared.

BEGINNING PRAYER

God, You have eternally existed as a loving, giving community of Father, Son, and Spirit, and You invite us to share in and reflect that loving community in our own group. Help us by Your Spirit to build a strong community of friends who love You, love each other, and together serve the world. Amen.

WARM-UP ACTIVITY

Ropes and cords are not just used in construction, but the technology of twining and braiding cords to produce strength and to conduct power has many common, practical applications that impact us all. In what ways have you used ropes or cords in your everyday life this past week? What activities or jobs would be impossible without some form of a rope or cord? How could these common, everyday uses for ropes and cords be good metaphors for the way we participate in and build our group?