

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Small Group Ministry

Loneliness

First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA, November 2019

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

“Know that you are not alone. There is strength and caring support for you here. You will find comfort if you but ask. Look around. You are part of a potential community. You can make it what you will.”- *Carolyn S Owen-Towle*

Check-in/Sharing: This is the time to mention briefly any major issues or events on your mind that you would like to share.

Topic: Loneliness

As human beings we are biologically programmed to be pack animals. Loneliness at any age can be harmful to health. Infants even when provided with all their physical needs, do not thrive when deprived of interaction with others, nor can they learn the traits which make them truly human. As we age, we suffer loss of contact with those who have been closest to us, and it can be a struggle to make new connections.

Most of us have experienced uncomfortably feeling invisible while surrounded by others. A crowd can be energizing to one and lonely to another. The need for closeness with our fellows is built into all of us, but the degree to which we require and recognize it is individual.

While for some loneliness can be depressing and debilitating; being alone can be joyful and renewing. Embracing times of solitude can encourage us to grow and return to the world refreshed. Feeling connected to others helps us feel whole. As in most things, balance is the key.

“Loneliness is, like, when you wish someone else was there, and solitude is when you enjoy being alone. I don't always wanna be alone, but I definitely like pockets of solitude to recharge and come back to myself. I think that's so important for everyone”. - *Jonathan Van Ness*

“Our uniqueness makes us special, makes perception valuable - but it can also make us lonely. This loneliness is different from being 'alone': You can be lonely even surrounded by people. The feeling I'm talking about stems from the sense that

we can never fully share the truth of who we are. I experienced this acutely at an early age.” – *Amy Tan*

“Loneliness is my least favorite thing about life. The thing that I'm most worried about is just being alone without anybody to care for or someone who will care for me”. – *Ann Hathaway*

“People think being alone makes you lonely, but I don't think that is true. Being surrounded by the wrong people is the loneliest thing in the world”. – *Kim Culbertson*

“There is a world of difference between solitude and loneliness.... Solitude restores body and mind. Loneliness depletes them. Solitude is the state of being alone without being lonely. ... Solitude suggests peacefulness ... enjoying the quiet and whatever it brings ... an opportunity to renew ourselves.” - *Hara Estroff Marano*

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- Describe times in your life when you have felt especially lonely.
- Have you ever felt lonely but not alone? Have you ever felt alone but not lonely?
- Could you share any ways you have dealt with loneliness that have worked for you? Any ways that did not?
- When do you like being alone or need solitude? When do you prefer to not be alone?
- What balance do you need between alone time and together time?

(Group will take a few minutes to consider topic and questions and then share).

Wrapping Up: How did you like this topic and session?

Closing Words

“When I get lonely these days, I think: So BE lonely.... Learn your way around loneliness. Make a map of it. Sit with it, for once in your life. Welcome to the human experience.” - *Elizabeth Gilbert, Eat Pray, Love*