



## Flood: Years of Solitude

To the one who sets a second place  
at the table anyway.

To the one at the back of the empty  
bus.

To the ones who name each piece  
of stained glass projected on a  
white wall.

To anyone convinced that a  
monologue is a conversation  
with the past.

To the one who loses with the  
deck he marked.

To those who are destined to  
inherit the meek.

To us.

By Dionisio Martinez

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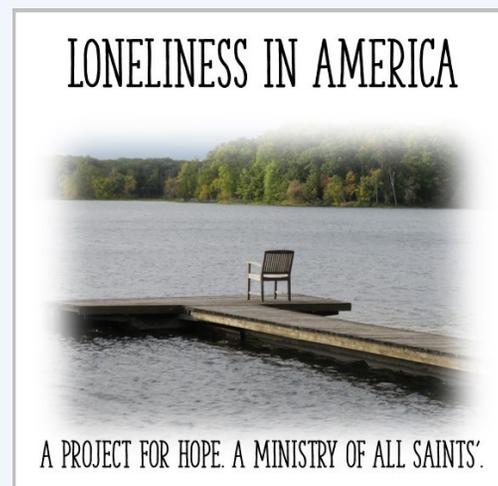
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For more resources, visit:

[allsaintsoncentral.org/loneliness-project](http://allsaintsoncentral.org/loneliness-project)

# Flying Solo

Understanding Our Loneliness  
in a Hyperconnected World



**ALL SAINTS'**  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH & DAY SCHOOL  
PHOENIX, ARIZONA

**W**e live in a mysterious time and place. We can communicate with anyone with an internet connection, but researchers warn us that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, an unprecedented crisis of loneliness is emerging among all age groups.

Almost 43 million adults are chronically lonely, and a 2018 study by Cigna Healthcare found that almost half of us sometimes or always feel alone or left out and don't have meaningful in-person interactions on a daily basis. 30% of us feel like people don't really understand us and 40% of us sometimes or always feel isolated and believe that our relationships aren't meaningful.

Modern loneliness also moves far beyond stereotypes. In 2018, 18-22-year olds were the loneliest generation, not the elderly. And the highest suicide rate, a reasonable gauge of chronic loneliness, is among middle aged men. We increasingly live alone because we increasingly are unmarried and childless. 25% of households include one person, 50% of the population is unmarried, marriage rates and number of children per household has declined and divorce is up among those 50 and older. Unfortunately, suicide is also up in this age group, 30% since 1999. Among middle aged men, it is up a staggering 50%. Living alone, or choosing not to have children, is a healthy choice for many individuals, but researchers generally find that living in community buffers against feelings of isolation.

Chronic loneliness isn't just a bad emotional state. It is unhealthy. Loneliness is a physiological warning bell. Historically, human survival depended on the small group, the tribe, with each member fulfilling an important function. This is how we survived. A need for other people is hard wired into our biology.

Because of this, loneliness is a psychological and physical stressor and changes the way our brains work. It makes it harder to:

- Tune out distractions and focus
- Self-sooth and manage incoming information
- Regulate our emotions and see things realistically
- Plan and organize tasks and our time
- Control our impulses
- Make thoughtful and moral decisions
- And solve problems



Feeling left out also makes us see other people as critical, judgmental, and unwelcoming. We then respond in social situations in ways that actually push people away- lashing out, acting like a victim, people pleasing. These effects build over the years and lonely people experience more social problems as they age.

Socially isolated people also have a 50% greater chance of dying in any given year than those who are socially connected because the chronic underlying stress wears down the body. This is comparable to the health effects of smoking 15

cigarettes a day. With fewer loved ones and loss of judgment, lonely people are less likely to take care of themselves and more inclined toward numbing risking taking behaviors like excess drinking. They have a higher likelihood of:

- Cognitive decline and Alzheimer's Disease
- Recurrent stroke
- Increased vascular disease
- Higher blood pressure
- Poor quality sleep
- Diminished immune functioning
- Abnormal white blood cell production
- Problems with daily living tasks in old age (walking, standing, etc.)

There are powerful social forces driving this trend. Americans value individualism and independence. We also value busyness and find meaning in our commitment to productivity. Our work lives are increasingly lived alone, rather than in teams, and we rely on digital communication to a level that may harm our ability and willingness to connect face to face. These challenges work across all age group, to some degree, but we have the capacity to influence their effect in our own lives.

We don't need to fly solo. The Loneliness in America Project has resources to help you live a more connected life. Go to [allsaintsoncentral.org/loneliness-project](https://allsaintsoncentral.org/loneliness-project) for more information.