

OBU

COUNSELING SERVICES



Loneliness

What do I do with this terrible feeling?

"I don't feel deeply connected with anybody. No one really knows what I'm going through. I wonder if I matter to anyone."

I don't know just how many of you have come in and expressed your loneliness, but it's certainly not simply a few. How does it happen? What causes a person to feel so desperately alone, disconnected, and/or insignificant to others? Never been there? Not to worry, your time may come.

There are some of you that are dealing with loneliness for the first time in your life. It may have surfaced sometime after you arrived at OBU, and has come in waves since then. You were a person who mattered to the people around you, in your family, or within your peer group. But those people aren't here. No one seems to know who you are or were. It feels almost like it was a previous life - when you had an identity and were recognized easily by those surrounding you. You long to "go home" or have others just walk up to you and invite you to join them, to include you, and act like you matter to them.

Or,

maybe, you have struggled with feeling unimportant or lesser than others for years. I could be that even in your

home, or as a child, you were treated as a misfit, a disappointment or an irritation, or like you just didn't measure up - predisposing you to question if you were normal.

This may have left you feeling you weren't or could never be enough (pretty enough, smart enough, witty or funny enough, talented enough, "masculine" or "feminine" enough, slim enough, or spiritual enough).

You may have concluded that you were inherently different and lesser than others, and that what you longed to be would always be just beyond your reach. If this is your story, I hope you'll come see me soon. I'm ready to help.

Or,

perhaps, over time you have developed the habit of comparing yourself with others around you, to conclude that you don't have what it takes. It could be that someone close to you compared you with others, or frequently focused on how he/she believed you "ought to be." You compare yourself with others every day, only noticing the



ways you think you fall short of who you wish you were or "should be." It leaves you feeling alienated and alone.

If you are in the middle of, or have ever had, your own bout with loneliness, you likely have a special sensitivity or keenly attuned eye to others who may be struggling in this area. So, **here's my counsel to you:**

- **Quit waiting** for others to come along and invite you into their group or activity! Make an effort, and continue numerous efforts, to do what may seem to be beyond your ability at the moment... reach out to not just one, but to a few *someones* whom you think may be lonely as well. Get to know them. Probe in the many ways you wish someone else would eagerly desire to get to know you!
- **Listen carefully for others' names** when you talk with them or introduce yourself. Say it to yourself in your head. Use it in a sentence as you ask them questions. Explore and discover something unique or interesting about the person, and connect that info with their name in your memory. Then, introduce them to someone else if possible. Dale Carnegie asserted that to hear someone use your name is "the sweetest sound in any language."
- **Work to steer your thoughts** from turning solely inward, fearing how the other person might be feeling about you! Instead, make it your goal to get to know the other person and demonstrate the fact that he/she is important enough to you for you to have taken the time to get better acquainted. "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you," Jesus said (Matt. 7:12). When you find yourself so wrapped up in what you're hearing from the other person that you start to forget yourself, and your own nervousness, you have succeeded!
- **There are truly hundreds** of other OBU students who arrived on campus knowing very few other people, if anyone at all. Some of them even struggle (just like you?) to come to the cafeteria, because it can be a place where their lack of connection or belonging seems to stand out the most, as they search for **someone** with whom they might sit, talk and enjoy a meal. You are not actually alone. There are MANY who feel as you do. Don't wait on someone else to make the first move, begin introducing yourself and developing your people skills. At first it will, of course, feel awkward. But that's normal. The more you exercise these social muscles, the more confident and "coordinated" you'll feel using them

and taking the initiative with others. If you're interested, "How to win friends and influence people," by Dale Carnegie, is a best seller that has helped millions become more confident interacting with others.

- Leaving the security and familiarity of your home life is a major step, and **some degree of loneliness is a normal** part of moving toward autonomous adult life, though it can be a bit unsettling. This process is not always easy. It presents difficult challenges for everyone. It's normal to feel more insecure at this stage than before, but "this too shall pass" with time and the support of many here at OBU who are ready to lift you up. Talk to your RA, to your advisor, or to someone else you sense genuinely cares.
- Jesus was telling the truth when he said that "it is much better to give than to receive." Proverbs says that "**the one who wants friends must show himself to be friendly.**" Mother Teresa, Amy Carmichael, Rachel Saint, Gladys Aylward, and others who poured themselves into others didn't set out to be loved by others, but the other-oriented trajectory of their lives brought as a result the love and support of countless people around them. One doesn't acquire true friends by waiting on them to arrive, but by investing yourself in those around you. *But, don't do it in an effort to elevate yourself in the eyes of others (you may set yourself up to be used as you become willing to compromise or violate your conscience in order to obtain a temporary and counterfeit sense of love or approval).*



or approval). Show others the warmth they need because that's what you'd want someone else to do for you, and because it's the right thing to do.

- There is someone right now at OBU who is hoping that you will reach out to him/her. (You may have noticed that person already.) You can be the one who makes a significant difference in another's life.

- Dan

Need to talk?

• phone: 245-5591

• email:

jarboed@obu.edu

• walk-in: Evans Student Center - Student Services Office



You are at a critical juncture or crossroads in life, and **who you'll become** is taking shape rapidly. We want you to become all you were meant to be, and "We're here to help" isn't just a polite gesture. It's for real. Come by, send an email, or call 5220 to set up a time to talk together.