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# LONELINESS

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A Data-Driven Report by CV Outreach

**HOW LONELINESS IS KILLING AMERICA, AND HOW THE CHURCH  
IS UNIQUELY POSITIONED TO ADDRESS THIS HEALTH EPIDEMIC**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

Section 1  
A Surgeon General's Warning

02

Section 2  
Loneliness by the Numbers

03

Section 3  
User Behaviors of Lonely People

04

Section 4  
The Unique Position of the Church

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# WHY LONELINESS?

*"It is not good that man should be alone"*

If you start at the beginning of the Bible, you won't go more than a few pages before coming to one of the most fundamental, human truths; it is not good for man to be alone. This phrase, spoken by God Himself during the Creation story is a seminal, often-overlooked aspect of the human condition. We were designed for relationships; ultimately a relationship with God Himself.

We chose to research the topic of loneliness for three reasons.

Loneliness has far-reaching impact on our culture, it's a rare opportunity for the church to directly impact a public health crisis, and it's a call to go back to the basics of what living out our faith looks like.

Regardless of whether you are in the church world, the ministry world, or simply a passionate follower of Christ, we hope that the analysis and findings in the next few pages will give you an overview of the issue of loneliness in America. At the end of the report, we'll provide a few suggestions for how we think individuals and churches can begin to reach the people in their midst who are struggling with loneliness.

Those final suggestions are rooted in the fundamental truth found in Genesis 2:18 that is echoed throughout scripture. God has called us out of loneliness and isolation into a life-giving relationship with Himself through Jesus Christ.

Our hope is that this report will help that message be effectively spread far and wide.

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# WHAT IS A DATA-DRIVEN REPORT?

The mission of CV Outreach is to connect people to the Church. This falls directly in line with the CV mission to reach people with the Gospel and encourage them to become true followers of Jesus.

In our desire to be good stewards of the opportunities that are available in our digital age, we believe that in order to reach people with the Gospel, it is imperative to leverage every chance we can to better understand them first.

Much has changed in our culture as we have entered the age of Big Data. Our daily lives are filled with novel digital experiences that are the result of Big Data being intelligently routed through algorithms and systems. There are endless opportunities to use this data to make intelligent decisions in every sector of life.

We believe that includes the area of evangelism and church outreach.

This is the first of many reports we hope to release that are data-driven. Much of this data is the result of the visionary partnership between churches from across the country and CV Outreach. In the past year, on behalf of our church partners, we have amassed actionable data from tens of millions of users from across America and beyond.

We believe that the analysis of user behaviors online can help any church better understand the needs and struggles of the people they are trying to reach, and cast vision for effective ways to do that.

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# A SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING

There is a growing health epidemic in the United States.



It's effecting up to 40% of the country.

The adverse health effects of this epidemic are on par with smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

It's more damaging to your body than obesity.

It's associated with a shorter lifespan, cardiovascular disease, dementia, anxiety and depression.

So, what is this health epidemic?

It's loneliness.

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## A STARTLING REPORT

Recently, Dr. Vivek Murthy, former Surgeon General of the United States, published a startling report on the issue of loneliness, categorizing it as not merely a feeling, but a physiological health epidemic in the United States.

Key to understanding the way that loneliness is affecting us, is shifting our perception of the issue from that of subjective feeling to that of transient human motivational state, like hunger, thirst or pain.

MURTHY



**"During my years  
caring for patients,  
the most common  
pathology I saw was  
not heart disease or  
diabetes; it was  
loneliness."**

**- Dr. Vivek Murthy**

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"Loneliness complicates underlying illnesses that a person might be suffering from, making it harder for them to cope and heal."

It may be easy to associate the feeling of loneliness with a lack of romantic fulfillment, but loneliness is much broader than that. It's a feeling that can effect people of all ages, from all socioeconomic backgrounds. It effects people in rural areas and people in urban environments. It effects married people as often as it does single people. It's associated with grief, major life changes, and even life success.

Loneliness complicates underlying illnesses that a person might be suffering from, making it harder for them to cope and heal.

Also, loneliness is considered an *epidemic*, specifically because one person's loneliness can impact another person's loneliness.



**"We live in the most  
technologically  
connected age in the  
history of civilization,  
yet rates of  
loneliness have  
doubled since the  
1980s."**

**- Dr. Vivek Murthy**



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# LONELINESS BY THE NUMBERS



## DATA

In this section, we will look at the rate of loneliness among different demographics and different geographic areas.

## ANALYSIS

The analysis in this section comes from aggregate data collected on behalf of our church partners across 400+ church websites, as well as publicly available google and census data.

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# WHAT DEMOGRAPHICS ARE MOST AFFECTED BY LONELINESS?

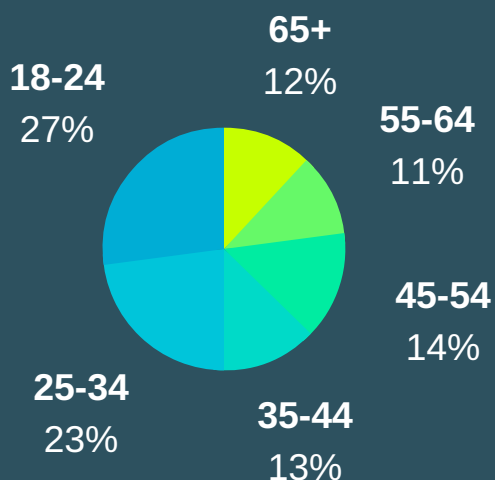
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As mentioned already, loneliness is an issue that doesn't discriminate. People from all walks of life exhibit signs of loneliness.

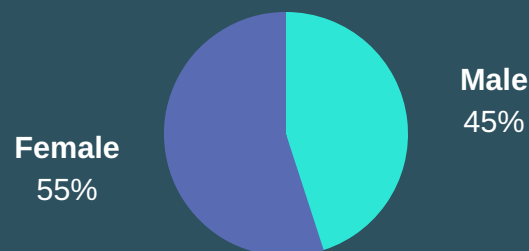
Here is a demographic breakdown of the people our partner churches have interacted with who are struggling with \*loneliness.

\*For this section, people are identified as "lonely" when they take the action of clicking on an ad that is targeted towards people suffering from loneliness and visit a landing page on one of our church partner's websites that is designed to appeal to people struggling with loneliness.

Loneliness by Age



Loneliness by Gender



**Millennials constitute  
an estimated 21% of  
the total population in  
America, but make up  
50% of the lonely  
population.**

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# WHAT AREAS OF THE US ARE MOST AFFECTED BY LONELINESS?

For this analysis, our Google Adwords Team, which oversaw more than \$20 million in Adwords spend last year, compiled a list of 100+ google search terms that are indicative of someone who is struggling with loneliness.

## KEYWORD EXAMPLES

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why do I feel so lonely  
struggling to connect  
I feel so alone

These search terms were then cross referenced month by month across different geographic areas with the appropriate population data. This resulted in a “loneliest area” designation based off of the total per capita lonely searches relative to the other results.

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# THE LONELIEST STATES IN AMERICA

These are, per capita, the loneliest states in America.

- *The top 16 states have a higher rate of loneliness than the national average*

- |                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Wyoming        | 26. Maryland       |
| 2. Vermont        | 27. Minnesota      |
| 3. Alaska         | 28. New Jersey     |
| 4. North Dakota   | 29. Arkansas       |
| 5. Delaware       | 30. California     |
| 6. South Dakota   | 31. Virginia       |
| 7. Rhode Island   | 32. Illinois       |
| 8. Montana        | 33. Mississippi    |
| 9. Maine          | 34. Iowa           |
| 10. New Hampshire | 35. Tennessee      |
| 11. Hawaii        | 36. Michigan       |
| 12. Georgia       | 37. Arizona        |
| 13. Idaho         | 38. North Carolina |
| 14. Nebraska      | 39. Florida        |
| 15. West Virginia | 40. Texas          |
| 16. Nevada        | 41. Kentucky       |
| 17. New Mexico    | 42. Alabama        |
| 18. Utah          | 43. South Carolina |
| 19. Oregon        | 44. Louisiana      |
| 20. Washington    | 45. Oklahoma       |
| 21. Colorado      | 46. Pennsylvania   |
| 22. New York      | 47. Indiana        |
| 23. Connecticut   | 48. Missouri       |
| 24. Massachusetts | 49. Ohio           |
| 25. Kansas        | 50. Wisconsin      |

# THE LONELIEST LARGE STATES IN AMERICA

These are, per capita, the 10 loneliest states with a population of at least 8 million

- *These states have 57% of the lonely population*

STATE	POPULATION (MILLIONS)
1. Georgia	10.31
2. New York	19.75
3. New Jersey	8.95
4. California	39.25
5. Virginia	8.41
6. Illinois	12.8
7. Michigan	9.9
8. North Carolina	10.15
9. Florida	20.61
10. Texas	27.86

# THE LONELIEST CITIES IN AMERICA

These are, per capita, the loneliest cities that have a population of at least 500k

- *Each of these cities has a higher than average rate of loneliness.*
- *The top 19 cities have double the average rate of loneliness.*
- *The top 3 cities have triple the average rate of loneliness in the country.*

- |                     |                      |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Las Vegas        | 18. El Paso          |
| 2. Washington, D.C. | 19. Charlotte, NC    |
| 3. Denver           | 20. Austin           |
| 4. Baltimore        | 21. Indianapolis     |
| 5. Seattle          | 22. Columbus, OH     |
| 6. Tucson           | 23. Fort Worth       |
| 7. Portland         | 24. Dallas           |
| 8. Boston           | 25. Jacksonville, FL |
| 9. Albuquerque      | 26. San Jose         |
| 10. Detroit         | 27. San Diego        |
| 11. Fresno          | 28. Houston          |
| 12. Nashville       | 29. Philadelphia     |
| 13. San Francisco   | 30. Chicago          |
| 14. Milwaukee       | 31. San Antonio      |
| 15. Louisville      | 32. Phoenix          |
| 16. Memphis         | 33. Los Angeles      |
| 17. Oklahoma City   | 34. New York City    |

**The rate of  
loneliness in Las  
Vegas, Washington,  
D.C., and Denver is  
3x than the national  
average.**

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# USER BEHAVIORS OF LONELY PEOPLE



## BEHAVIOR

In this section, we will look at the online behaviors exhibited by people who are struggling with loneliness.

## ANALYSIS

The analysis in this section comes from aggregate data collected on behalf of our church partners across 400+ church websites.

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# THE CV OUTREACH AD GRANT STRATEGY

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In order to fully understand the following data, it's important to know the CV Outreach Strategy that is responsible for the data.

Part of the CV Outreach strategy is to help our church partners turn their church website into an outreach tool.

This is done by equipping them with a growing number of topical landing pages. There are currently 22 different topical landing pages across every CV Outreach church partner website. A complete list of topics can be found at [cvoutreach.com/current-content](http://cvoutreach.com/current-content).

Each of our Ad Grant Partners has qualified and been onboarded to the Google Ad Grant, which awards 501c(3) organizations up to \$10k/mo in in-kind advertising on the Google search network.

The people that are connecting with CV Outreach churches start their journey by googling a phrase that our Adwords team is targeting from each church's Ad Grant account.

That person sees a text advertisement on google, and when the user clicks on the ad, they are routed to the topical landing page that is most closely associated with the phrase that was googled.

94% of the website visitors from the 10 million people that visited one of our partner church websites in 2017 had never been to that website. They are there mainly because they are being given an opportunity to find answers or get help with an issue or question that they are dealing with.

The landing pages consist of two main Calls to Action, the opportunity to watch a topical video that provides them with a Biblical view of the problem that they are dealing with, and an opportunity to directly email the church pastor from that landing page.

We refer to those emails as "responses".

Let's dig into these responses.

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# ANALYZING RESPONSES

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In order to gain a better understanding of the core issues surrounding loneliness, we analyzed the responses that were directly indicative of a lonely person.

To start, the following words (and common variants) were used in a search against all responses received from any of the 9000+ potential landing pages that are hosted on one of our 400+ church partner websites.

<i>isolated</i>	<i>rejected</i>
<i>alone</i>	<i>unloved</i>
<i>lonesome</i>	<i>unwanted</i>
<i>friendless</i>	<i>outcast</i>
<i>forsaken</i>	<i>lonely</i>
<i>abandoned</i>	

The resulting messages were then fed into Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) which is a topic modeling approach that tries to discover the underlying themes or topics from a corpus of text.

The top 10 underlying words/topics were:



*life*  
*husband*  
*time*  
*feel*  
*marriage*  
*family*  
*need*  
*know*  
*house*  
*Pray*

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The summary of this analysis is that loneliness itself does not live in isolation. Those suffering from loneliness might be affected with this feeling based off of other core issues; things like marital struggles (husband, marriage), existential struggles (time, life, know) family struggles (family, husband), immediate financial concerns (need, pray) and general anxieties and worries (need, feel, pray).

Also, while it's fairly obvious that the majority of people submitting "lonely" responses were connected through our "Loneliness" landing page, there are still a large number of people who submit responses through one of the other landing pages which deal with topics like marriage and divorce, the meaning of life, the problem of evil, and even seasonal pages for holidays like Christmas. This reinforces the idea that loneliness can sometimes exhibit itself not as a core issue, but as an underlying symptom of another, immediate issue.

**Loneliness often  
surfaces, not as a  
core issue, but as an  
underlying symptom  
of another,  
immediate issue.**

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# TOP GOOGLED TOPICS FOR LONELY PEOPLE

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In order to take a step back and consider where the majority of lonely responses originated from, we analyzed the keywords that were googled by people who ended up submitting a response that was designated as "lonely".

Based on our data, there were two trends in the top keywords that resulted in someone submitting a response labeled as "lonely". These were that the keyword was indicative of someone actively seeking spiritual guidance on how to deal with their problem or the keyword was indicative of someone seeking a direct, human connection.

Spiritual Guidance examples:

*Prayer request*

*How to pray*

Direct Connection examples:

*I need someone to talk to*

*Feeling alone what to do*

This is a fairly clear indication that regardless of a person's offline behavior, while online, their behavior shows that they are exhibiting clear calls for help.

This glimpse into the documented struggles and searches of an issue that is usually dealt with in private provides clear opportunities for us as Christians.

# THE UNIQUE POSITION OF THE CHURCH

With measurable data like this, there is a clear opportunity to draw a line in the sand and work to see measurable improvements on an issue that previously might have been thought of as a subjective, private struggle.

We believe that the Corporate Church in America should be the clear leader in the battle against loneliness.

The fact that loneliness is now thought of as a transient human state reinforces Biblical Truths around the idea that God has called us into healthy relationships, ultimately into a relationship with Himself. It is the way we were created.

As *communities* of believers, as the *family* of God, with commandments to love our neighbor, and care for the vulnerable, the impetus is clear; a growing population of people suffering from loneliness is a direct affront to the efficacy of the Church.

With a few simple opportunities, we can reverse the tide of loneliness, and draw people into healthy communities that can lead to life-change through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

# AS INDIVIDUALS

As a follower of Christ, you have a clear opportunity to be the Church for someone. As the Church, we will never be corporately what we aren't individually. Impacting an aggregate trend like loneliness starts with individual efforts.

## Exhibit healthy online behaviors

Recently, social media platforms like Facebook have come under fire for their apparent impact on our psychological well-being. There is clear evidence that passive engagement on our "feeds" can result in a downward spiral of real life problems, including loneliness. It's important for believers to exhibit healthy online behaviors. If we are to use social media platforms for the Gospel, we need to maximize our time spent calling people into real engagement, and minimize the time we spend curating the best parts of our lives to showcase an inauthentic public persona.

**"THE FEELING OF BEING ALONE IS A LIE THAT IS WHISPERED IN ONE'S EAR, IN THE FACE OF AN INCREASINGLY CONNECTED WORLD"**

Remember that many people who are lonely, may take the first step towards connection in an online environment. We need to be ready for them, and give them that opportunity.

## Strategically prioritize knowing your neighbors

Here is a simple exercise. Draw a map of your home, and the homes that are immediately adjacent to yours. Write down the first and last names of everyone who lives in each of those homes. If you are drawing a blank on any of them, prioritize connecting with those people.

The feeling of being alone is a lie that is whispered in one's ear, in the face of an increasingly connected world, and increasingly crowded living environments. It's a lie that would have one believe, that even though they are surrounded, no one knows them, and know one cares.

It's up to us to strategically and deliberately rebut those thoughts in our immediate area of impact.



**Loneliness would  
have a person  
believe, that even  
though they are  
surrounded, no one  
knows them, and  
know one cares.**

**Individually, we can  
challenge those  
inner thoughts with  
simple acts of  
kindness and caring.**

# AS A CHURCH

The church is the most uniquely positioned entity in our country to directly impact the number of people suffering from loneliness. Churches consist of communities of believers who should be intrinsically motivated to engage their community and invite people out of loneliness, care for them when they are suffering, and pray for God to miraculously intervene.

Churches exist in unique cultural contexts across this country, and we believe that each one is capable of addressing this issue within their own context. However, to start with, here are a few ideas:

## Speak Publicly

Your local church has the opportunity to speak publicly the truth found in the Gospel to people who are privately struggling.

**"CHURCHES EXIST IN  
UNIQUE CULTURAL  
CONTEXTS ACROSS  
THIS COUNTRY AND  
WE BELIEVE EACH  
ONE IS CAPABLE OF  
ADDRESSING THIS  
ISSUE WITHIN THEIR  
OWN CONTEXT."**

Speaking Biblical truth into areas of private struggle can be done on Sunday from the pulpit, in a special call to connect, through church outreach events, or through home groups.

The call to action doesn't have to be complicated. It can simply be "We know, that based on the data we have, many of you may be privately struggling with loneliness.

God does not intend this for your life, and as a church we want to make sure you know that we are here to connect with you, and talk with you in confidence".

It's an acknowledgement of the issue, and a call to connect with someone who cares. It's that simple.

This can also be done through church digital outlets, like the church website or social media accounts.



# AS A CHURCH (CONT'D)

## Connect With People Online

We believe that the CV Outreach strategy of connecting with people during their time of searching is an effective avenue towards meaningful connection. Besides the quantifiable data, we have an amazing amount of anecdotal examples of people who were connected to a church through the Ad Grant partnership.

While the CV Outreach Ad Grant Partnership is free, and we would welcome any kingdom-minded church who wants to partner with us, we also know that there are a variety of ways to connect with people who are searching for things online.

So, regardless of whether or not a church partners with us in something like that Ad Grant Partnership, we encourage all churches to actively prioritize online engagement as a starting point to meaningful connections.

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**"MORE THAN ANYTHING, THIS TYPE OF CONNECTION  
REQUIRES A DELIBERATE STRATEGY, AND A VISION TO  
CONNECT WITH PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF WHERE THEIR  
STARTING POINT IS."**

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The data is clear that, more than likely, in your church's immediate vicinity there are a growing number of people suffering from loneliness, and other felt needs issues. Many of these people might be reluctant to physically step foot inside a church, but more than willing to engage with someone online.

Your church has the opportunity to meet them where they are.

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# CONCLUSION

We hope this report has helped provide you with some insight on the issue of loneliness in our society. It's a unique struggle and one that we believe may become even more pronounced in the coming years if the Church does not intervene.

More than anything, we hope that, for all believers, the marching orders are clear.

The only way to address this health epidemic is to be a country filled with churches that are effectively reaching people with the Gospel. It's a rare opportunity to measurably impact a public health concern by simply living out our faith.

We are devoted to this cause and hope you are too.

*If you would like to help us share this report, and raise awareness for this issue, you can find more resources at [fightloneliness.org](http://fightloneliness.org).*

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# DOCUMENTATION

[https://faculty.wharton.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Work\\_Loneliness\\_Performance\\_Study.pdf](https://faculty.wharton.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Work_Loneliness_Performance_Study.pdf)

<https://hbr.org/cover-story/2017/09/work-and-the-loneliness-epidemic>

<http://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2017/10/04/this-former-surgeon-general-says-theres-a-loneliness-epidemic-and-work-is-partly-to-blame/?utm\\_term=.bfcfbde8b348](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2017/10/04/this-former-surgeon-general-says-theres-a-loneliness-epidemic-and-work-is-partly-to-blame/?utm_term=.bfcfbde8b348)

<https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/distribution-by-age/?dataView=1&currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22collId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>



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