

# Show Up and Speak Up!

There is no perfect, one-size-fits-all cure for loneliness. But God does offer us “substantial healing” from our loneliness, and from other effects of our common human brokenness.

Here is a somewhat lengthy but wonderful quote from The Spirituality of Imperfection, by Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, about what makes for the experience of community.

Human beings connect with each other most healingly, most healthily, not on the basis of common strengths, but in the very reality of their shared weaknesses. ... Shared weakness: *the shared honesty of mutual vulnerability openly acknowledged*. That’s where we connect. At the most fundamental level of our very human-ness, it is our weakness that makes us alike; it is our strengths that make us different. Acknowledging *shared weakness* thus creates a rooted connectedness, a sense of common beginnings. ... Spirituality begins with this first insight: We are all imperfect. Such a vision not only invites but requires Tolerance: active appreciation of the richness and variety of human beings on this earth, along with the understanding that we all struggle with the same demons, we all share the same fears and sorrows, we all do the best we can with what we have. (The Spirituality of Imperfection, 198-199)

A major hindrance to the experience of community is our difficulty in talking about our pain. We feel afraid; we feel ashamed; we want to maintain a certain image of ourselves, first for ourselves and then for public consumption. It is perfectly understandable – “The most universal fear of all people is to be found out, to be known, and then to be rejected” (John Powell, The Secret of Staying in Love, 76) – and yet it keeps us isolated and lonely.

We can’t get out, we can’t go back, so we must go through. We must take the great risk of Showing Up and Speaking Up. **Show Up:** As the great Jewish philosopher Woody Allen has said, “Eighty percent of success is showing up.” As the Alcoholics Anonymous slogan says, “Bring the body and the mind will follow.” **Speak Up:** Take what’s on the inside and bring it out, into a safe, sympathetic and non-judgmental environment.

Both *sympathy* and *compassion* mean the same thing – “suffering together with.” One fundamental way of “suffering together with” each other is listening to one another. “If I have been successful in listening, I will convey to the speaker a reassuring: ‘I hear you!’ And the speaker’s reaction will be something like this: ‘Thank God! Someone finally knows what it is like to be me!’” (The Secret of Staying in Love, 123)

The following exercise can be practiced by two people, or with a larger group. The only “rule” is that the listeners must limit their replies to “Thank you” or “Thanks for sharing”; a response of respectful but empathetic silence is even better. No comments, corrections, critiques, or criticism, please! Be fully present for the speaker ... and then it will be your turn to share!

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- Sometimes I just need a hug.
- Sometimes I feel unloved.
- Sometimes I just want to be listened to for 10 or 15 minutes.
- Sometimes I'd like to tell the "long version" of my story to someone.
- Sometimes I need a place to go where I can just "be myself."
- This week I'd like to go somewhere with someone and do something fun!
- I'd like to hear, "I'm so glad you're here!"
- Sometimes I feel invisible.
- I like it when people give me sincere compliments.
- Sometimes I wish I could have a safe and friendly place to hang out.
- I like it when people say to me, "I really appreciate what you do for others."
- Sometimes I'm afraid that if people *really* knew me they wouldn't like me.
- Sometimes I feel like screaming.
- Sometimes I feel disappointed by other Christians.
- Sometimes I'm afraid.
- I'd like someone to ask me, "What are some of your dreams, goals, hopes, wishes?"
- Sometimes I don't think people take me seriously.
- Sometimes I just need to hold someone's hand.
- I think that, given the chance, I could do something really significant.
- Sometimes I just need to "vent" for about 5 minutes.
- I think I could really make a contribution to a small community of people.
- Sometimes, when I'm in a bad mood, I just need those around me to be OK with that.
- Sometimes I get depressed.
- Sometimes I'd just like to go for a quiet walk with somebody.
- Sometime I'm afraid of being exposed as a phony, a fraud or a hypocrite.
- Sometimes I wish I could do something fun and adventurous with a few other people.
- Sometimes I feel so lost.
- I like it when people say, "Come join our group!"
- Sometimes I feel like giving up.
- Sometimes I get tired of people trying to "encourage" me, fix me or teach me.
- Sometimes I'm afraid that I'll never experience love.
- I'd like to be part of a group where I could talk about my problems and struggles – whatever they are – and the people there would accept me and not judge me.
- Sometimes I wish I didn't feel so responsible for \_\_\_\_\_.
- I'd really like to be in a group where people can share what's going on in their lives, without comment or criticism.
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