



# Why You Are **Lonely**

And How to Make Real-Life Connections

Love means **more.**



United States  
Conference of  
Catholic Bishops



In 2023 the U.S. Surgeon General declared that we were in an “epidemic of loneliness and isolation.”

That’s ironic because thanks to the internet, each of us is connected to more people in more places than ever before. Yet loneliness is on the rise. A 2023 Gallup report found “over 1 in 5 people worldwide (23%) said they felt loneliness ‘a lot of the day yesterday.’”

If you often feel lonely and need pointers on how to build relationships that last, you’ve come to the right place.

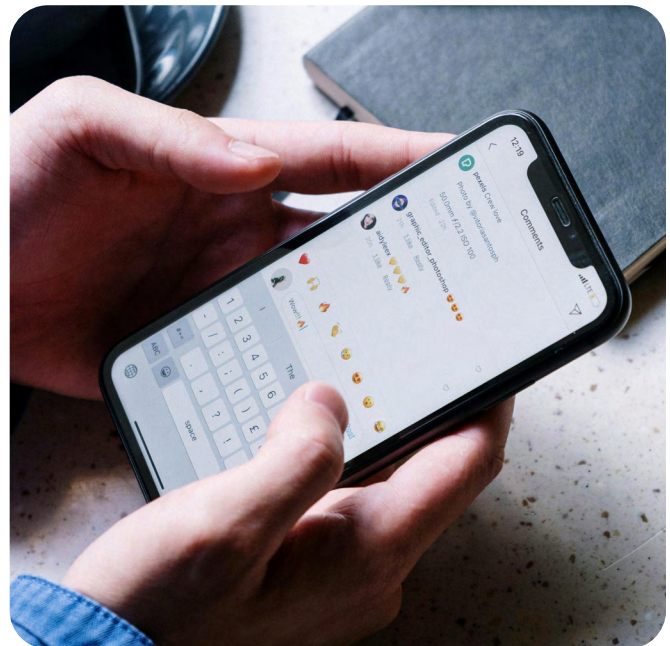
# 1. Stop living life through social media.

Social media has many benefits. You can see photos of a cousin's wedding or a friend's new baby – a real blessing when you can't be with them in person. But research demonstrates a connection between social media dependency and loneliness. For example, a **2025 report from Oregon State University** revealed that “those in the upper 25% of social media usage frequency were more than twice as likely to experience loneliness.”

Why does this happen? People often present curated moments that showcase the best parts of their lives. You scroll past one person sipping wine in the Tuscan countryside and a couple getting engaged in front of the Eiffel Tower. It can start to feel like everyone else is living a dream life while you're falling behind. That illusion can quietly fuel self-doubt and isolation.

You must remember that picture-perfect posts rarely tell the full story. Behind every filtered (and sometimes unfiltered) photo is a life filled with the same struggles, setbacks, and uncertainties we all face.

Ultimately, we're human beings made for real, in-person connection. A screen can share pixels, but it can't replace presence. Seek out face-to-face moments. They're where real life happens.



## 2. Build real-life social connections gradually.

Not ready to start attending social events? That's okay. Look for little opportunities for interaction, such as:

- Chatting with your cashier.
- Giving a compliment to someone while waiting in line.
- Petting someone's dog (with permission, of course).

These encounters aren't meant to turn into full conversations (although some naturally do). They're low-risk but go a long way toward building confidence.



### 3. Awkward at parties? Try **a class** instead.

Have you ever gone to a social gathering where you didn't know anyone, or tried to join a small group, and ended up feeling like an outsider crashing a tight-knit clique? Or worse, you're standing alone at a party, hoping someone strikes up a conversation?

Don't let those awkward moments keep you home. If you're looking for a low-pressure way to meet people, try joining a group centered around a hobby or interest. Whether it's a book club, board game night, cooking class, or something else entirely, shared interests make it easier to break the ice.

Another great option is volunteering. Because you are engaged in an activity with other people, there is less risk of awkward silent moments.

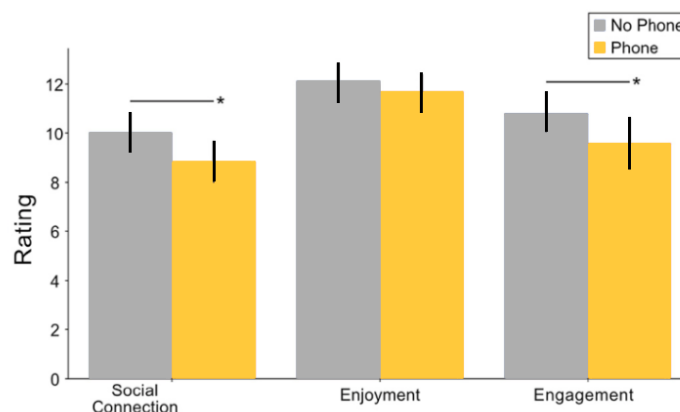


## 4. Be **attentive** to others.

A good relationship is a two-way street. Nobody wants to hang out with someone who only talks about themselves. If all your conversations start with “I am,” “I want,” or “I like,” don’t be surprised if you struggle to make friends. Practice being present to those you’re interacting with by:

- Putting away your phone while they speak. One study found evidence that phone use in conversations can hurt relationships.
- Not jumping in with your own stories too soon.
- Not rushing to fix a problem or judge. Sometimes people just want to be heard.
- Responding with thoughtful questions. Studies show that asking questions makes people more likeable.

When you make other people feel seen, you’ll find that connections grow naturally and deeply.



Results from Study 1. Confederate's phone use reduced participant's feelings of social connection and engagement, but had no effect on enjoyment. \*  $p < .05$ . Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

## 5. Practice gratitude for the relationships you do have.

It's easy to get so bogged down in loneliness that you forget the people who already bless your life. Maybe it's an old college roommate who stays in touch, the sibling who visits you, the coworker who brings you coffee.

Happiness doesn't come from knowing a lot of people. It comes from receiving love, even if it's from a faithful few. It's better to have one person stick with you through life's ups and downs than 30,000 Instagram followers who won't show up when you need help.

If you have such a person in your life, thank them. Cherish them. And reciprocate by supporting them.



By taking these small steps, you can begin to build relationships. And who knows? Some may develop into lifelong friendships.

But don't expect results overnight. Keep practicing and enjoying the many interactions you have along the way.

Begin your journey to understand how to cultivate authentic relationships by visiting [LoveMeansMore.org](https://LoveMeansMore.org).

