

# essentials

*six keys to inspire spiritual vitality*

**Darius Johnston &  
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# Introduction

What does it take to inspire spiritual vitality in the lives of today's Christ-followers? In the complexities of society it's easy to lose sight of the core issues that generate spiritual health and produce change within us and around us. If we're not careful, life will pass us by and we will wake up in a sea of regrets. What's important will have been replaced with what's urgent and the price tags on the essentials of life will have been exchanged without ever realizing it.

In this challenging study you will discover six essentials to live a complete life that help you reach your full potential. The six essentials include:

- Connect: When God is Not Enough
- Grow: Becoming all God Intended You to Be
- Serve: Finding and Fulfilling Your Place of Service
- Share: Let's Go Fishing
- Give: Handling What Belongs to God
- Lead: Using Your Influence to Make a Difference

Designed to be used in a small group setting, this study will challenge you to build relationships, embrace a learning attitude, serve others, share the hope of Christ, wisely steward God's resources, and use your influence to create change in the world around you. And as you embrace each essential, you will experience spiritual vitality and enjoy the life God intended for you.



# To the Small Group Host

This study is designed to serve as one part of a strategy to connect people with people, with God, and with ministry. The following tips should help you prepare to facilitate a successful group meeting.

First, begin each meeting with time to connect with people. Starting with 20-30 minutes of snacks and soft drinks will provide a great atmosphere for members to visit and get acquainted. In the first session, it is always good to let everyone briefly introduce themselves.

Secondly, spend 45 minutes on the weekly study questions. A good rule of thumb is that no one is required to share but everyone is welcome to share. You will need to be familiar in advance with the questions and be prepared to monitor the time. It is not necessary to ask every question. It is often best to already pick the key questions you feel would be pertinent to the group so that you give priority to them.

Each session includes a three-fold focus to the questions – Connect, Grow, and Serve – to help foster healthy discussion around the study of God's Word. *Connect* questions are designed to help group members get to know one another and break the ice relationally. *Grow* questions are the largest part of each session and take the study deeper. *Serve* questions are designed to help participants apply what they are learning by serving those inside and outside the group.

Finally, be sure to reserve 10-15 minutes for prayer. You can start the first week by asking each person if there is anything they would like the group to pray with them about. In addition, have someone write down the requests to share by e-mail with the group. You can conclude with prayer – everyone praying, one person, or several people.

The discussion of Biblical principles and the prayer time are crucial elements. Several resources are available from Christ Church to coach you on how to conduct good discussion and how to lead an effective prayer time. You can contact Christ Church at 817-292-9292 or [connectiongroups@christchurch-ag.org](mailto:connectiongroups@christchurch-ag.org) to get these materials.



## Connect

*When God Is Not Enough*

*Darius Johnston*



Pollster George Gallup's studies show that Americans are among the loneliest people in the world. His surveys indicate that as many as one-third of adult Americans say they have frequent periods of loneliness.

Author and pastor Charles Swindoll tells of an ad that appeared in a Kansas newspaper that read, "I will listen to you talk for 30 minutes without comment for \$5.00." Some thought it was a hoax, but the person who placed the ad said they averaged between 10 and 20 calls a day.<sup>1</sup>

One source defined *loneliness* as:

an emotional state in which a person experiences a powerful feeling of emptiness and isolation....Loneliness is a feeling of being cut off, disconnected from, and/or alienated towards other people.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, loneliness frequently occurs in individuals who are surrounded by lots of people. It is possible to be in daily contact with hundreds of people and yet feel alone. Dr. Roberta Hestenes, president of Eastern College in St. Davids, Pennsylvania, coined the phrase *crowded loneliness* to define this phenomenon. She says the brief contact with many people in a crowded society actually raises barriers to developing meaningful relationships.

Loneliness can be:

- **Situational** – provoked by a change in circumstances, such as moving to a new environment or the loss of a relationship.
- **Developmental** – our need for intimacy balanced with our need for aloneness is a process that develops throughout the life stages.
- **Internal** – unrelated to external situation or age-and-stage, often including feelings of low self-esteem and vulnerability, probably stemming from early years.<sup>3</sup>



## Connect

1. Why do you think so many Americans say they have frequent periods of loneliness?

2. Have you ever experienced a time of *crowded loneliness*? If so, what do you think caused this feeling and how did you overcome the loneliness?



## Grow

The Bible tells us that when God created the universe He noted everything was good—except for one thing. The one thing that God recognized as “not good” was for “man to be alone” (*Genesis 2:18*). So God made another human being in order to fill the gap in His creation. Some have said there are two vacuums in every human being--a God-shaped vacuum and a human-shaped vacuum. Just as we all need a relationship with God in order to fill the God-shaped vacuum, we all need human relationships to fill the other vacuum. We were all created for relationship!

3. What do the following scriptures say about relationships?

- Ecclesiastes 4:9-10
  
- Proverbs 15:22
  
- Proverbs 27:17

In the New Testament book of Romans, Paul tells us that those who are followers of Christ “form one body” and “each member belongs to all the others” (*Romans 12:5*).

4. What do you think Paul meant when he said that we “form one body” and “each member belongs to all the others?”

Let’s look at a passage of scripture from Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth.

*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

*Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. (I Corinthians 12:12-20)*

5. Notice how many times Paul uses the phrases “one body” and “many parts.” What was Paul trying to stress with these two phrases?

6. What would Paul say to the person who says, “I’m not like other people so I don’t have a place in the body of Christ?” (see verses 15 and 16)
  
7. How about to the person who says, “I don’t need anybody else; I can do life on my own?” (see verses 17 and 18)

### Common Effects of Loneliness

1. **Loneliness can lead to immoral relationships.** Since intimacy with another is one attempt to dispel loneliness, we can seek out immoral relationships. But all the physical contact in the world cannot fill any empty, lonely heart. It may satisfy for a brief season, but the problem remains.
2. **Loneliness can impact our finances.** Often when we are lonely, we think that purchasing certain items will give us an emotional lift. It may, but it can also put an unnecessary dent in our wallet. Abuse of credit cards can sometimes be futile attempts to break through the enclosing walls of loneliness.
3. **Loneliness can damage our self-esteem.** This is perhaps the greatest danger in dealing with loneliness. We doubt our worth to God and others. We feel so alone and hopeless. We no longer see ourselves from the perspective of the Scriptures. Loneliness distorts our self-esteem and puts us into false bondage. Lonely people want to reach out to others but feel they cannot.
4. **Loneliness can produce physical problems and even lead to suicide.** Our bodies and emotions are intertwined. Excessive sieges of loneliness can create physical problems. Worse, the despair can be so great that suicide becomes an option. The thought that nobody cares is a common thread in suicidal cases.<sup>4</sup>

8. Have you seen any of the effects of loneliness in someone's life? If so, what were the long-term results?

Let's look at another passage that Paul uses to teach us about relationships:

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (Colossians 3:12-15)*

Lonely people tend to build barriers to relationships in their lives instead of bridges for relationships. Some do not have the tools or know how to build bridges. In this passage, Paul gives us some of the building blocks of relationships.

9. What does each of these qualities have to do with building relationships? Which two qualities do you think needs the most work in your life?

- Compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Gentleness
- Patience

- Forgiveness
- Peace
- Thankfulness



## **Serve**

10. Who are the lonely people in your sphere of influence (family, work, neighborhood, and church) to whom you could build a bridge?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. As a group, are there some people you could decide to actively target to build relationships with in order to help them overcome their loneliness? Why not list three or four individuals and ask for God to direct your group to a plan to touch their lives and fill that “human-shaped” vacuum?

If you have never become a part of the *one body*—the body of Christ, we are told in the Bible that we must do three things:

- Acknowledge that we are all sinners and we cannot save ourselves (Romans 3:23).
- Believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died and rose for the sins of mankind (Romans 10:9, 10).
- Confess with our mouth that Jesus is the Lord (Master) of our life (Romans 10:9).

If you would like to make this commitment, talk with your small group host or say this prayer of commitment to Christ:

*Dear Heavenly Father,  
I come to you in the name of Jesus Christ and acknowledge that I am a sinner. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died for my sin. I ask you to forgive me of my sin and to be the master of my life. I confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and commit to follow you the rest of my life. In Jesus name I pray, amen.*

If you made that commitment to Christ, I would encourage you to share your decision with your small group host. They will be more than happy to help you grow in your spiritual journey. Welcome to the family of God!

## **Notes**