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WHEN MOTHERHOOD IS LONELY BY **NANCY BRINKERHOFF**

Motherhood can be isolating as well as joyful, and honest reflection can help families find strength, support, and grace in lonely seasons.

When God declared, *"It is not good that the man* [or "the person"] *should be alone"* (Genesis 2:18), it was the first thing described as *"not good"* in a world full of *"good"* and *"very good."* The contrast is striking. And, perhaps, it should have warned us to take loneliness more seriously than we do.

Loneliness was not something either believers or society at large discussed much in the past. Long-term studies from the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st show single-digit rates of reported loneliness across most groups, rates that in fact seemed to be declining. Predictably, this changed with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In various surveys conducted in 2020 and 2021, up to 25% of the population of the US reported feeling lonely. Suddenly, the issue of loneliness was a major news story.

Public health officials were already using the phrase "loneliness epidemic" before Covid. But in the years since, individuals and groups in various fields have latched on to this new way of framing the problem. Ironically, loneliness may not just be an individual experience, but a society-wide public-health problem. Now conversations are not just about how shy people should make more friends, but about the larger structural problems in our communities.

Unsurprisingly, the issue of loneliness came up frequently in the 2024 *Tidings* "Christadelphian Moms' Survey." The survey did not ask directly whether moms felt lonely, but the problem was constantly listed as a major challenge. New moms, single moms, moms whose husbands travel a lot, moms in small ecclesias or without much support—motherhood is so frequently lonely.

In our survey data, around 80% of moms reported having supportive people in their life that they could talk to about parenting challenges. While this is an encouragingly high number, that still leaves around 20% lonely—a statistic that tracks with population-wide figures noted above.

There are no easy answers to the problem of maternal loneliness. Relationships are complicated to create and maintain. But there is still a lot that individuals and communities can do. Some ecclesias offer ongoing moms' groups, sisters' classes, or homeschool co-ops or meet-ups. Individual sisters find groups to join through schools, community centers or local churches. And many others quietly find support with other moms or older sisters because someone prayerfully took the initiative to reach out.

Another option that has become more viable in recent years is a virtual moms' group, meeting online through Zoom or another platform. This is something that individual ecclesias could set up for their members, in addition to or in place of traditional sisters' classes. For moms in smaller ecclesias or without local peers, there is an ongoing weekly Zoom meet-up and WhatsApp group that have become a valuable means of support. Moms in the North American time zones who are home weekdays can contact this author through the Tidings for more information about this particular group.

For moms—and all of us—the problem of loneliness will never go away. But if even non-believers recognize that loneliness is an issue for society to face, we too can choose to take it seriously. However we manage to do this, we can all be more intentional about building the kind of community that takes to heart God's first warning for us: *"It is not good that the person should be alone."*

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