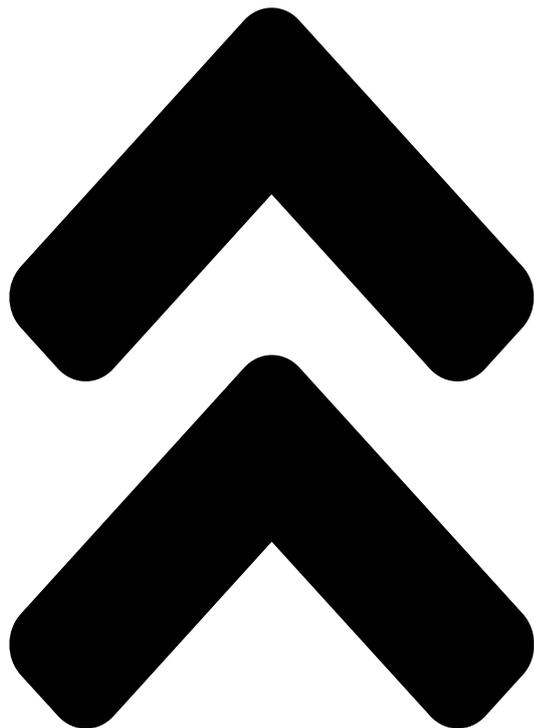


Loneliness: a Huge Threat to our Health

My last post, Where did all our friends go? walked through how our friends change in childhood, college, and as couples throughout our life. For men, in particular, the loss of close friendships often leads to isolation and dealing with the stress of life in unhealthy ways. Often we deal with it all alone!



Loneliness is Killing us

A 2017 Boston Globe article by Billy Baker titled, The biggest

threat facing middle-age men isn't smoking or obesity. It's loneliness. is the story of every man. Baker describes men in particular as cut off from their friendships by being over-scheduled pursuing the great American dream, the demands of work and family, of carpools and commutes. This applies to older men but it appears in rising numbers in younger men too.

Our Mask Doesn't Help

My experience is that a large majority of men prevent their friends from really knowing them due to a fear of being found out about our imperfections. We hide behind one of our many "masks" and it may be killing us physically, emotionally, and spiritually!



Our deep-seated fear is that no one will want to be our friend if we take off the mask and admit our weaknesses to them. Essentially, the enemy whispers his lies . . . "They already have plenty of friends." "Who are *you* anyway?" and "If they

find out about the real you, they'll reject you."

And you respond, "Yea, I already have too much to do with work, family, church, kids' sports and all. I don't need any friends anyway!"

"Without wearing any mask we are conscious of, we have a special face for each friend."

-Oliver Wendell Holmes, Journals, 1843

Baker says men are "starved for friendship." His own limited social life is made up of "friends at work and at the gym," friends, who he calls, "accidents of proximity." he writes, "I rarely see those people anywhere outside those environments, because when everything adds up, I have left almost no time for friends. I have structured myself into being a loser." Very sad.

Baker goes on to write about the dangerous health risks of social isolation and what factors might be responsible:

"Dr. Richard S. Schwartz, a Cambridge psychiatrist...and his wife, Dr. Jacqueline Olds, literally wrote the book on this topic, The Lonely American: Drifting Apart in the Twenty-First Century. He agreed that my story was very typical. When people with children become overscheduled, they don't shortchange their children, they shortchange their friendships. "And the public health dangers of that are incredibly clear," he says. "

...Loneliness has been linked to an increased risk of

cardiovascular disease and stroke and the progression of Alzheimer's. One study found that it can be as much of a long-term risk factor as smoking."

Gentleman, we are facing an epidemic of loneliness and we need to do something to help other men develop and maintain deeper friendships. It really is a matter of life and death!

Feel free to comment below about what you feel are the major effects in your life when you feel most lonely.