



# LifeSpot ... Connecting

## Life, not loneliness

In New Zealand, the body of an 88-year-old man is discovered in his apartment, many months after his death. In Germany some years ago, the skeleton of an elderly man was found nearly five years after he died. The skeleton was sitting on a couch, an open TV guide beside it, while the TV blared. In these cases, the individuals apparently wanted aloneness and privacy. But a 55-year-old widow in Chicago who leapt from her 12th-floor apartment left this note: "I cannot stand one more day of this loneliness. I have no friends. I receive no mail. No one calls me on the telephone." Governments cannot fix this issue; nor can science or academia. But the church of Jesus—when functioning well—is ideally suited. "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10 (NIV).

## Community, not isolation

The sad sagas of people like Howard Hughes and Janis Joplin prove this message: Joy and meaning do not come from fame and financial success. Joy and meaning come from significant relationships we build with other human beings over time. Humans are more like pelicans than polar bears. We associate, we group together—we are driven to connect with each other. Studies show one of our top fears is aloneness. We know by instinct that isolation leads to desperation and madness. It's with this awareness that Christians build community. Even the shy among us can smile, take genuine interest in a lonely person, ask if there's help we can give. "They'll know we are Christians by our love."

## Acceptance, not exclusion

Jesus met a lot of disconnected people. The diseased, foreigners, open sinners, the disabled, the impoverished, people on the wrong career track. People separated from family or society. People separated from the church of the time—from the privilege of full fellowship, worship and ministry. In its obsession with religious purity, the church drew a narrow circle that shut people out. Hallelujah! Jesus arrived and drew a wider circle that brought people in. People the church regarded as total outsiders—like Zacchaeus and Mary Magdalene—suddenly found themselves part of Jesus' inner circle! "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28 (NIV).

## Giving, not grasping

"It is well to remember that the entire population of the universe, with one trifling exception, is composed of others."—J A Holmes. But sometimes those "others" are too much! We have to get away from them. It's OK—even Jesus had to slip away, to find solitude, to disconnect from the crowd so he could reconnect with Heaven. Matthew 14:22–23. But when he returned from the solitary place, Jesus was able more effectively to reach the people he'd come to help. This is our pattern for connecting. Each of us is a tiny exception in God's universe of others—but many of the others need exactly what we have to offer. It's a choice for giving, rather than grasping—and in giving, we find joy.