



Project UnLonely: Healing Our Crisis of Disconnection
By Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH

Book Club Discussion Guide

[Project UnLonely: Healing Our Crisis of Disconnection](#) was written by Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH, to help us see, understand, and navigate loneliness through art-making and creative expression.

Engaging in creative expression can be an act of self-compassion that leads to genuine connection. Exploring creative expression through book clubs can be a powerful way to bring people together, whether virtually or in person, to build a meaningful community grounded in empathy and shared understanding.

Use the following questions to spark thoughtful conversations, deepen your understanding of the reading, and foster closer connections with those around you. The questions are ordered by chapter, you can choose which questions work best for your group for an open discussion.

1. “Lonely people are often reluctant to admit they’re lonely—even to themselves. Our culture idealizes autonomy and self-sufficiency. In a world of seemingly infinite opportunities for connectedness on social media, being unable to find a place for oneself in real life can be upsetting” (pg. 8). Why is it so hard to admit we feel lonely, and how can we begin to change our attitudes and talk about it in our day-to-day lives?
2. Attached is a representation of the 9/11 Memorial children’s art discussed in Chapter 2. Please take 5-10 minutes to examine these pieces and reflect on how they make you feel: <https://911memorial.org/Visit/Museum/Exhibitions/Drawing-Meaning>, writing down your thoughts as you reflect on them. In what ways can art help us process loneliness, trauma, or grief? Are there ways that you personally use art to support your overall health and well-being? Or ways that others use art that you find particularly interesting or intriguing?
3. Dr. Nobel introduces the reader to the three foundational types of loneliness in Chapter 3: *Our Loneliness Heritage*: Psychological (the usual loneliness description), Societal (being systemically excluded), and Existential loneliness (spiritual loneliness). Have you seen or experienced any of these? If so, which one feels most familiar to you? By making it personal, a facilitator might open a door for emotions they can’t manage; perhaps ask a less personal version of this question. The “three types” is a worthy topic leading to a rich conversation!

4. Think back to the subsections *Tocqueville's Curse* & *The Creative Impairment* (Chapter 3), both of which speak to the limitations put on creative expression by society. Individualism and a mindset that limits the boundaries of success hold us back from imaginative manifestations. The lack of use can atrophy our creative muscles that allow us to connect with those around us. What are some examples you could implement in your own life that are the social equivalent of “working out” to stay emotionally connected with others, instead of physically fit?
5. Consider Thoreau’s ponderment of being *alone* in nature in Chapter 3, that he was “no more lonely than the loon in the pond that laughs so loud, or than Walden Pond itself” (pg. 36). Where is a place, real or imagined, where you feel completely welcome and free? (Optional Activity) Take 5 minutes to sketch the feelings or emotions that this place evokes. Then share with the group.
6. Reference Chapter 5: *Illness*, which contemplates mental and physical ailments and their role in loneliness. Have you ever seen the power of social connection in helping someone through depression, anxiety, or a physical or mental illness?
7. “To be unlonely in this world, we each need to find ‘our’ people, the ones who accept us as we are and welcome hearing our story” (pg. 113). How can feeling like an outsider increase loneliness, and how can finding community turn that around? Why does community matter even more for people who face multiple forms of stigma?
8. Review the stories in Chapter 9: *Difference*, and contemplate how you could have recognized and helped Rebecca, Bruce Willis, or young Dr. Jeremy Nobel with their loneliness. What are some early signs of extreme loneliness we often miss, and how can we respond with compassion?
9. “Art is a medicine that requires no prescription. There is no co-pay required for creating and conversing. Creative expression is a tonic to be imbibed freely and often, without any side effect except the chance to connect more deeply with the humanity you share with the rest of the world” (pg. 223). Share a piece of art (a photograph, painting, sculpture, or any creative work) that has touched your heart. It can be something you made or something that deeply moved you. Have everyone share their story with the group, offering thoughtful comments and reflections.
10. Chapter 10 - What is a small act can we do to address loneliness? What is a small way/action step you could do to get involved with your community?

Please visit our [Creativity Hub](#) for additional activities to do together as a group.

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