

Lecture 1

We will look at basics in pages 10-17 in textbook to begin our class.

I. LONLINESS

A. *The Problem of Loneliness*

Dr. Gary R. Collins says:

"Loneliness is the painful awareness that we lack meaningful contact with others. It involves a feeling of inner emptiness which can be accompanied by: sadness, discouragement, a sense of isolation, restlessness, anxiety, and an intense desire to be wanted and needed by someone.

Christian psychologist Craig Ellison has suggested that there are three kinds of loneliness: emotional, social, and existential.

The **emotionally lonely** person feels utterly alone and can only recover by establishing new in-depth relationships with others.

Social loneliness is the feeling of aimlessness, anxiety and emptiness. The person feels that he or she is "out of it" and on the margin of life. That kind of person needs a supportive group of accepting friends and skill in relating to others.

Existential loneliness refers to the sense of isolation which comes to the person who is separated from God and who feels that life has no meaning or purpose.

Such persons need a committed and growing relationship with God, preferably within the confines of a concerned community of believers.

B. *The Causes of Loneliness*

Loneliness may have many and varied causes, and identifying the causes in a specific situation is most often a job for a highly trained professional.

Here are some causes:

1- **Low Self-Esteem**

How is it revealed? "negative evaluations of their own bodies, sexuality, health, appearance, behavior, and functioning"— contribute to a young person's vulnerability to feelings of loneliness.

As Collins writes, "When we have little confidence in ourselves it is difficult to build friendships. The person is unable to give love without apologizing; neither can he or she receive love without cutting oneself down."

2- Poor Family Relationships

A number of studies suggest that family background is a crucial factor in a young person's vulnerability to loneliness.

3- Societal Factors

We live in a society that tends to promote loneliness.

Our society is fast, mobile, and changing. Every year 20 percent of the families in America move.

4- Temporary or Changing Circumstances

"People are lonely because they build walls instead of bridges." Of course, this isn't the only reason for loneliness, but sometimes individuals do erect barriers to keep others out.

5. Hostility

Some people are lonely because they harbor feelings of anger and bitterness that alienate others and drive them away.

6. Inability to Communicate

Collins points out that an inability or unwillingness to communicate is sometimes at the root of a person's loneliness:

7- Spiritual Causes

Saint Augustine prayed, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and the heart of man is restless until it finds its rest in Thee." Some loneliness results from estrangement from God.

8- Other Causes of Loneliness

Ellison, in his book gives some causes for loneliness.

- Shyness • Feeling misunderstood • Unresolved conflict with someone • Feeling unneeded • Physical separation from loved ones • Feeling you don't belong
- Rejection • Physical illness • Criticism by an influential person • Busyness
- Death of a friend or loved one • Desiring a relationship that isn't happening
- Breakup of a relationship

II. The Effects of Loneliness

Loneliness affects young people in many and varied ways.

1- Physical Effects

Loneliness can affect our actual physical bodies.

Eating and sleeping are frequently affected.

Obesity and greed may well be symptoms of loneliness, although a loss of weight can also be traced to despair that goes with a feeling of being of no importance or worth to anyone, not even to ourselves—also aches in the body.

2- Spiritual Effects

Persons suffering with extreme loneliness will often feel out of fellowship with God, estranged from Him, perhaps even deserted by Him.

On the other hand, it is possible to feel a sense of consistency and security when there is a well-established relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

3- Low Self-Esteem

In the cruel cycle that loneliness creates, low self-esteem and a poor self-concept can be not only a cause but also an effect of loneliness.

4- Dependence

. . . An overly dependent person . . . becomes excessively distraught if he is rejected by someone. He clings to people, sucking up all their emotional energy. He is unaware of the potential strength that lies within himself to make the most out of life.

5- Depression and Despair

Loneliness breeds depression, which can lead to despair and, in some cases, to suicide. Youth often keep their problems and feelings bottled up inside, fearing to express how they feel or not knowing how to express how they feel, increasing their sense of aloneness and heightening the despair they feel.

6- Violence

Very lonely people, who get angry rather than depressed, will be prone to express their lonely frustration in destructive ways.

7- Substance Abuse

Alcohol and drugs often seem to be attractive means of escape to a chronic sufferer of loneliness, and may turn to substance abuse in an attempt to "drown their sorrows".

III. The Biblical Perspective of Loneliness

"Loneliness," said the blind poet John Milton, "is the first thing which God's eye named not good."

See Genesis 2:18

"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."

Loneliness is rarely discussed in the Bible, but it is seen repeatedly, even in the lives of such giants of the faith as Jacob, Moses, Job, Nehemiah, Elijah and Jeremiah, John at Patmos, Apostle Paul.

See II Tim.4:9-12

A growing relationship with God and with others becomes the basis for any solution to the problem of loneliness.

IV. The Response to the Problem of Loneliness

When helping lonely teenagers, however, the wise youth leader or adviser will instead pursue a course such as the following, which may help determine the root problem and address it effectively:

LISTEN.

EMPATHIZE.

How do we empathize as the young person shares his or her feelings of loneliness, communicate your empathy and interest by:

- Leaning slightly forward in your chair.
- Making eye contact.
- Nodding to indicate understanding.
- Reflecting key statements ("You feel . . ." and "You're saying . . .").
- Waiting patiently through periods of silence or tears.

Be careful not to say "I know how you feel," or to relate stories from your past, but try to communicate that the young person is not alone in feeling the way he or she does.

AFFIRM. Be alert to every opportunity to offer sincere and truthful affirmation to the young person, particularly if there is a chance the youth's loneliness is a result of low self-esteem.

DIRECT. Gently but firmly guide the youth to talk through the causes and effects of his or her loneliness, sensitively steering him or her to accept responsibility. If we blame our lonely situation on someone else, we'll only feel bitter.

Be especially alert to opportunities to guide him or her to answer the following:

1. Is the loneliness due to a temporary situation?

2. Is the loneliness due to changing circumstances?

Life has a way of surprising--or disappointing— us with sudden changes that throw us off balance. Friend moves, parents get divorce, grandparent die, best friends begin to do things you cannot do.

3. Is the loneliness due to something inside the youth? Perhaps the youth is shy by nature.

Point the youth to Christ and to the local church, prayer and fellowship with God. Pray with him or her, asking for God's comfort and guidance in the young person's battle with loneliness.

ENLIST. Once the primary cause or causes of the loneliness have been identified, enlist the young person's participation in developing a plan of action for overcoming his or her loneliness.

Refer him or her as soon as possible to professional Christian counseling if suicide seems to be an option to the young person.

TWO KEY SCRIPTURES US IN STUDY ON LONELINESS....

Genesis 2:18

18 And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

Psalms 25:16

16 Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted.

I. The Problem of Anxiety

Stress and anxiety become a way of life for many young people today.

Anxiety can be defined as the experience of unrest, apprehension, dread or agitated worry. It has been described as a fear in the absence of real danger, or a fear of something that is not clearly understood.

II. The Causes of Anxiety

Collins outlines five broad causes of anxiety:
threats, conflict, fear, unmet needs, and individual differences.

A. Threats

Collins describes anxiety-producing threats as "those which come from perceived danger, a threat to one's feelings of self-worth, separation and unconscious influences. . . ."

For example, anxiety may be caused by:
rejection or harassment from a peer,
the possibility of parents' divorcing,
the prospect of flunking a course in school, etc.

B. Conflict

There are three kinds of conflicts that produce anxiety, according to Collins:

(a) . . . a conflict over the tendency to pursue two desirable but incompatible goals (such as a choice between a great summer job or going on a long-awaited family vacation], either of which would be pleasant. Often making such a decision is difficult and sometimes it is anxiety arousing.

(b) . . . a desire both to do something and not to do it. For example, a person may grapple with [ending a romantic relationship that seems to be going nowhere. Breaking up might bring more freedom and opportunity, but it might also be a traumatic, hurtful experience for both parties.] Making such decisions can involve considerable anxiety.

C. Fear

Different people are afraid of failure, the future, achieving success, rejection, intimacy, conflict, meaninglessness in life (sometimes called existential anxiety), sickness, death, loneliness, and a host of other real or imagined possibilities.

D. Unmet Needs

"For many years psychologists and other writers have tried to identify the basic needs of human beings," writes Collins. He cites Cecil Osborne's conclusion that six needs are fundamental:

- survival (the need to have continued existence)
- security (economic and emotional)
- sex (as an expression of love; as a sexual

being)

. significance (to amount to something; to be worthwhile)

- self-fulfillment (to achieve fulfilling goals)
- selfhood (a sense of identity)

E. Individual Differences

"It is well known, of course, that people react differently to anxiety-producing situations; ' writes Collins. "Some people are almost never anxious, some seem highly anxious most of the time; many are in between.

1-Psychology-

2-Personality.

3- Sociology.

4. Physiology. "The presence of disease can stimulate anxiety, but so can dietary imbalance, neurological malfunctioning and chemical factors within the body."

5- Theology. "Beliefs have a great bearing on one's anxiety level.

6- False Beliefs. Not only may a person's beliefs contribute to the experience of anxiety; Dr. G. Keith Olson identifies specific false beliefs as a major cause of anxiety among youth.

III. The Effects of Anxiety

Anxiety sometimes produces beneficial effects; it can motivate a person, for example. Too much anxiety, however, can produce severe, even crippling, effects.

A. Physical Effects

B. Behavioral Effects

C. Spiritual Effects

Anxiety can motivate us to seek divine help where it might be ignored otherwise. But anxiety can also drive us away from God at a time when he is most needed.

D. Psychological Effects

It is with reason that anxiety is considered the "most pervasive psychological phenomenon of our time."

Several kinds of disorders:

- **Separation Anxiety Disorder.
- **Avoidant Disorder of Adolescence.
- **Phobic Reactions.
- **Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia.
- **Movement Disorders.

IV. The Biblical Perspective of Anxiety

Collins points out that the Bible uses "anxiety" in two distinct ways: to signify unnecessary worry and to indicate realistic concern.

V. Response to the Problem of Anxiety

Trying to help a person suffering from acute anxiety is a difficult task, but one that can be aided by a course such as the following:

- LISTEN.**
- EMPATHIZE.**
- AFFIRM.**
- DIRECT:**
- ENLIST.**
- REFER.**