



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Loneliness in Marriage – Part 1

Guest(s): Dennis and Barbara Rainey

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Dr. Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: The wedding day is the most important and joyous day in a person's life. However, for many couples, they find themselves days, months, or even years later, feeling isolated in their own homes. For some husbands and wives, their spouse has become a stranger. In some cases, they're living completely separate lives. This concept of loneliness inside of marriage is a common problem in the American home today. But as you'll hear through this broadcast here on Family Talk, reconciliation and reviving this lifeless relationship is possible. Today, we're reaching back into our Family Talk audio vault to hear a timeless conversation on this subject.

In just a moment, you'll hear Dr. Dobson's insightful discussion with Dennis and Barbara Rainey. They are the founders of FamilyLife, a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. Dennis served as its president and CEO for nearly 45 years before transitioning out of that role in 2018. He's the author of more than 35 books, two of which were given the ECPA Gold Medallion Award. Dennis and Barbara Rainey had been married nearly 50 years and have six children and many, many grandchildren. This godly couple has helped countless marriages over the years through their popular Weekend to Remember Marriage Getaways. And as we begin this classic broadcast, Dr. Dobson touches on the impact of those conferences. Let's listen in.

Dr. Dobson: Dennis, explain how your seminars work.

Dennis Rainey: Well, we have a staff team in Little Rock, Arkansas, about a hundred staff that work year round, just putting on these FamilyLife conferences throughout the United States. It starts on a Friday night, goes all day Saturday and all day Sunday. It's over about 4:00 on Sunday afternoon. It's basically a weekend to remember where a couple just gets away, you and your wife. And there's two couples who speak at each of these FamilyLife conferences throughout the United States. And in the midst of this, you go through projects and-

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. It's not primarily a lecture series, is it?

Dennis Rainey: Well, there's a couple of hours of lecture, and then there's an hour and 15 minutes of project we intersperse throughout the weekend, there's a good time of application, lots of good love letters. We've been told that there should be a Kleenex in the manual at certain spots where these love letters are written to one another. And then at the end of the conference, we challenge people to go back in there to communities and make a difference in families where they live. That, to me, is the real challenge today for all of us is to passionately commission the layman to make a difference in their families where they live.

Dr. Dobson: You're actually turning people away, aren't you? It's incredible, the response that you've had.

Dennis Rainey: We've had several cities throughout the United States we had to shut down the registration just because we didn't have room in the hotel. In fact, one of our problems in our FamilyLife conferences is in some cities, we can't find hotels large enough for the demand and for the weekend experience, they're held in a quality location, a quality hotel in different cities throughout the United States.

Dr. Dobson: What does that tell you, Dennis, about where people are today? What are you hearing? In the days when I used to travel and speak a lot more than I do now, I used to pick up impressions about where the family at large was, and now I get that through the mail. But what are you hearing as you talk to people?

Dennis Rainey: I think, Jim, people are urgent about solving their marriage problems. I think they realize the impact their marriage is going to have, not only on this generation, but the legacy we're going to leave to other generations. And to me, for anybody to come to a conference where they don't know who's going to speak for a weekend to get God's blueprints, and that's how we advertise it, "Come and get God's blueprints for building a godly home." They come in droves, bringing groups of people and they're coming with problems. They're coming with good marriages. They're coming with great marriages, but all trying to make this thing successful. Because I think we're seeing a shift today back to people saying, "I want to make a difference in my marriage. I want it to be good, successful. I want it to outlive my material achievements."

Dr. Dobson: Well, when you say they don't know who's going to speak, you're obviously not attending every one of these conferences. I think on your brochure, I saw about 20 couples...

Dennis Rainey: That's correct.

Dr. Dobson: ...that hold these seminars.

Dennis Rainey: That's right. We have a team of 20 couples that speak throughout the United States and we also have a film series by the way that is in Canada right now that people are attending in churches there.

Dr. Dobson: There are no live conferences up there.

Dennis Rainey: Not yet. We're hoping to have that at some point. But the interesting thing, Jim, is that people today are so hungry to make their marriages strong. They're coming to these conferences, again, not to hear us, as a couple, because as you said, we're not there. But they're coming to get those blueprints to make a difference in their marriage, to hear the scriptural blueprints for how to build a home.

Dr. Dobson: I firmly believe that there are millions of people in the Western world who have come to recognize that they're going to lose something very precious to them, something priceless if they don't make a specific investment to hold onto it and they are willing to make that, pay that price.

Dennis Rainey: I say quite frequently today, we need to do more to discriminate in favor of our marriages and in favor of our families rather than against it, where there are a lot of things that pull and tug at our marriage and our relationship with our family. And there aren't many things that refurbish the romance, that strengthen that relationship and help us achieve oneness.

Dr. Dobson: Barbara, where do you think women are today in terms of this issue of preserving marriage, especially those in your situation with a large number of children to raise, are there some generalizations in what you're hearing that can be helpful to us?

Barbara Rainey: I think women, especially, are really interested in preserving their marriages because I think women have such a great felt need for relationship with their husbands and with their children. And I think oftentimes, these women are the ones who are motivated to get to the conferences. They're the ones who encourage the husbands, "We've got to go to this thing," because they have this great felt need for relationships. But I also think too, that the women today are experiencing a greater loneliness than they've experienced in the past because of all the things in our society that are erecting barriers between people. And so I think out of their loneliness personally, they're motivated to try to get this marriage.

Dr. Dobson: What a beautiful lead in to today's topic, Barbara, because you have written a book called *Lonely Husbands, Lonely Wives*, subtitled *Rekindling Intimacy in Every Marriage*. You obviously are writing from the perspective you just described that there are a large number of people, particularly women, who feel lonely, who feel that they don't have that kind of intimacy. What motivated the book?

Barbara Rainey: I think the main motivation for the book was a real need to put in a capsule form, which the book is, much of what we teach at our conferences because there've been people who've come to our conferences and they sit through the weekend and they're motivated and they're encouraged, but they know of a brother or a sister that they wished they had been able to bring that they couldn't bring or someone in their neighborhood and they want to be able to share what they've learned. And so the main motivation initially was to meet that need of people who want to be able to share what they're learning at our conferences with others as well.

Dr. Dobson: Dennis, describe this loneliness, what is it you're getting a handle on here? What is the emotion? What is the emptiness, the lack of intimacy that you were describing?

Dennis Rainey: Well, the word we talk about, Jim, is isolation, and the theme of the book is that every marriage, given its own course, will naturally drift toward isolation, two people separate from one another. It was interesting as I was doing some writing on this, one time, my 10 year old daughter, Ashley just kind of slipped up beside me and kind of nuzzled next to me. She was watching me type on the computer and she said, "Dad, what are you writing about?" And I said, "Well, I'm writing about isolation, princess." That's my pet word for her. And I just kind of wanted to see if she understood what the word meant. And I said, "Do you know what isolation is?"

And she said - after a moment of thought, she said, "Yeah, that's when somebody excludes you dad."

Dr. Dobson: That's not bad for a 10 year old.

Dennis Rainey: It's not bad for an author either and I used it because it's exactly a picture of what happens when two people begin to allow, as Barbara said, those walls or those barriers begin to be erected in their marriage relationship.

Dr. Dobson: I dealt with this in 1975 in my book, *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women* and I listed 10 sources of depression that I'd heard in counseling so frequently. And I ask women to rank order those 10 according to the influence in their own lives. And loneliness, isolation, and boredom ranked fourth. Of all the reasons that women get depressed, that was right near the top. And so that's been going on for a long time and it's still very much out there.

Dennis Rainey: I think it is and I think it's going to become a larger issue. One expert described what we are suffering today as crowded loneliness. We have a lot of "friendships," but not many people that we really get below the surface with so we can really get to know them.

Dr. Dobson: Now, that's a very important point. How can a person be lonely when, let's say it's a woman, and she's got four kids and she has a husband and she's running flat out all day from the time her feet hit the floor until the time that she goes to bed at night? She's rarely ever alone and yet, she feels something's missing inside. Barbara, what is that something?

Barbara Rainey: Well, the something is an in depth relationship. And I can identify with that because when I get up in the morning, my feet hit the floor and rarely do I sit down all day long. And it's very easy with a family, with children and a husband, for wives to feel lonely and to feel isolated.

Dr. Dobson: Have you ever felt that, Barbara?

Barbara Rainey: Yes, because there's nothing naturally that pulls us together. We have to fight for our relationship. We have to make it a priority. We have to schedule time together and we let the children know that mommy and daddy need to have time together. And if that isn't a priority in a marriage relationship, the kids are going to even drive you apart because children want that attention for themselves and if it means pulling mommy away from daddy to get what I want, then they'll do that. So I think it's a real great need, especially for women because they're with all these people, with the husband, with the children but unless they make an effort to build that, that deep relationship with their mates, they won't...

Dr. Dobson: It's not. I didn't mean to cut you off there.

Barbara Rainey: That's okay.

Dr. Dobson: But it's not just being together either.

Barbara Rainey: No.

Dr. Dobson: It's something more than that, isn't it? It's hard to get a handle on. Intimacy is difficult to describe, but you know it when you have it.

Barbara Rainey: That's right.

Dr. Dobson: See if you can put it into words.

Dennis Rainey: It's a partnership. It's a sharing of life together. And too many women have told us at our FamilyLife conferences, "My husband doesn't include me in his life. He doesn't take the time to bring me in and make me a partner in his decisions, as he goes through sharing the stresses of life." They're not together in raising the children. Many times, there are only two successful people out there doing their own things and their lives are only touching at points. So I think this thing of intimacy is a mutual dependence upon one another and especially in this society today, Jim, because I think we're being sent a mixed message by the culture

saying, "You can be independent of one another. You can be successful by doing your own thing, be all you were meant to be." And yet the scripture contrasts with that greatly, which talks about a complete dependence upon Jesus Christ, and then a dependence upon one another...

Dr. Dobson: One another.

Dennis Rainey: ...to make that marriage work.

Dr. Dobson: Your title is *Lonely Husbands, Lonely Wives*. Now we've only described it in the feminine context to this point. Do you hear for men who are lonely as well?

Dennis Rainey: Well, men, I think, today suffer from a problem far greater than the woman, because they don't know how to establish meaningful relationships. We have a lot of men today who do not know how to love, who do not know how to risk being open, who do not know how to allow their wives to gain entrance and partnership into their lives. And so, as a result, they're insecure and we're covered over by this great number of insecure men today who don't know how to allow their wives to gain entrance into that partnership of marriage and life.

Dr. Dobson: Do they know they're lonely?

Barbara Rainey: I don't think they do, a lot of them. I think they're just as lonely as the women, but I think women tend to be more in tune with their feelings and they're more skilled relationally and so I think women are more in tune with that. Whereas, men often are not and they're so sold out to business and other things that they are oblivious to that need.

Dr. Dobson: Dennis, you all talk in your book about the marriage garage, explain what you mean by that.

Dennis Rainey: Well, it's two people who look like they have their marriage together and on the outside, all those from the outside looking in would say those two people are perfectly happy, but in reality, they don't have much of a relationship. They're really isolated, but they may not even know it. They may be just those two people who are just successfully doing their own thing separately and independently, like we were talking about earlier.

Dr. Dobson: And that's why it comes as such a shock when people like that get a divorce when nobody knew they even had any problems.

Dennis Rainey: It is. Because many times, I think we look at a divorce as a blowout, but it really wasn't a blowout. It was a slow leak. And I think isolation can begin even when we are engaged, when we're dating, when we begin to exclude one another, because of fear of rejection, because of maybe a fear of being known by the other person. And then it begins to creep on them, and there are major segments, or walls of our life we wall off from one another. And then later on,

when there is no relationship, it blows up and it looks like it occurred at a point in time. But actually, it's been occurring over a lifetime.

Dr. Dobson: Barbara, I'm going to give you a little one item test. Okay?

Barbara Rainey: All right.

Dr. Dobson: We're going to give you a final exam on your book and I'm going to role-play with you. I'm a woman who lives in your neighborhood and I call you on the phone. And I say, "Barbara, can I come over? I just really need to talk to you." You say, "Sure." And so, I come over, you serve me a cup of coffee or tea and we sit down and I say, "I don't know what's wrong with me. There's this tremendous emptiness inside. There's a soul hunger and I don't know what to do with it. My husband is a good man. He's faithful to me. He provides for the kids and the family. He doesn't drink. He doesn't kick the dog. He's been a good husband, but we don't have anything in common with each other and it seems to be less and less all the time.

And he's working long hours, working six days a week and he's taking on new things that'll even perhaps take him on the seventh day. And I don't know what to do with my life." Is this the person that you are writing about? Did you have her or somebody like that in mind?

Barbara Rainey: Yes, we did. Because I knew of some people who were in situations like that. And I imagined them as we were writing portions of it. And I think that's very common today. I would say to that woman that one thing in particular is that I would encourage her to take initiative in developing that relationship with her husband. I would encourage her to find some things that they have in common, that they enjoy doing together, that would give them occasion to spend time together. I think, too often, women are expecting too much out of their husbands. They want the husband to come home and for them to sit down on the couch and talk together, but that's too intimidating. It's a fearful situation for a man to be sat down and say, "Okay, now we're going to talk." And he just kind of freaks.

Dr. Dobson: Reveal your feelings and he doesn't know what they are. Yeah.

Dennis Rainey: Right.

Barbara Rainey: But if she will enter in to something that they enjoy doing together, fishing or shopping, whatever it might be that they could do together, gardening. There are myriads of things that a couple can enjoy doing together. Maybe it's just going for drives out in the country. But if there's something that they can do together to build that relationship, to give them time together, it's much easier for that relationship to grow, to have time to talk, to be able to share together.

Dr. Dobson: Does all of the loneliness emanate from difficulties with her husband? What about relationships with other women? What would you say to her about other sources of meaning in her life?

Barbara Rainey: Well, I think it's important for women to have other women friends. I mean I have other friends that I enjoy being with and doing things with, but Dennis is my best friend and I wouldn't want it to be any other way because if he isn't my best friend, then that means I'm spending an awful lot of time developing a best friend with someone else. And I don't have that kind of time. And I want him to be my best friend. I want him to know all of what's going on in my life before I let someone else know what's going on in my life. So that doesn't mean that I don't need other women and that I don't enjoy them. And if this woman who was my neighbor didn't have some good friendships, then I would think that she should reach out and develop some friendships with some other women, but not to the exclusion of her mate.

Dr. Dobson: Dennis, what would you say to her?

Dennis Rainey: Well, I take a little different approach. I think one of the missing ingredients of couples today is they don't have a mission. They don't have a sense of God having called them to do something together as a couple. And I think that today, Jim, there is a great opportunity in our culture for couples to begin to reach out in their neighborhood and help other marriages that may not be as good as theirs and begin to strengthen them. When Nehemiah rebuilt the wall, the way he did it was he got people rebuilding the wall in front of their own homes. And I think today that's what needs to happen as well. And I think one of the ways that we can defeat isolation is by having the God-given dignity of a God-ordained mission in life, "Running the race that is set before us," the writer of Hebrews said. Having a sense of going somewhere as a couple so that God can bless, you can be focused outward rather than always inward. Sometimes our loneliness is there because we're too self-absorbed sometimes.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. When I saw the title of your book and first had it put on my desk, I had the same thoughts about it that I have about some of my writings, especially the book I mentioned before of *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women*. I didn't want to have the effect of causing people who are coping fairly well with life to suddenly say, "My goodness, I've got a huge problem. I should be depressed over that."

Dennis Rainey: Right.

Dr. Dobson: And to focus more on themselves. And that's why the last chapter of my book says, "Build the best relationship you possibly can. Work to make it all that God wanted it to be. Communicate to the very best of your ability." But when you get all that done, it's still going to be an imperfect relationship.

Dennis Rainey: Right.

Dr. Dobson: And accept it like it is and reach out to other people. There's a balance there someplace, isn't it?

Dennis Rainey: Not place too much hope on the marriage relationship.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah.

Dennis Rainey: But instead realize it for what it is, something that God gave us for meaning, but that our ultimate hope can only be satisfied on the other side of the pearly gates. That's where there is no disappointment. That's where there are no more tears.

Dr. Dobson: Find that meaning in a relationship with Jesus Christ, because there are some men who are not going to meet their wives' needs.

Dennis Rainey: Absolutely.

Dr. Dobson: Some of those that are listening to us right now.

Dennis Rainey: Absolutely.

Dr. Dobson: We could send them into despair if we're not careful by making them feel, "Man, everybody has something going that I don't, and I'm not able to implement those principles and what am I going to do?"

Dennis Rainey: Right. Exactly. And I would say that your exhortation at the end of your book, which is what we try to do at the end of ours as well, is point that couple or the individual outward to the needs of other people is one of the most important things. When Christ left, what was his last principle he taught? "Go therefore and teach all nations." He didn't leave the disciples focused inward. He had them focused outward. And I think as we live in the 21st century, one of the greatest witnessing tools for people to come to Christ is going to be a husband and wife who are living in this imperfect relationship with two imperfect people, but who still love one another and are remaining committed when the culture is saying bailout.

Dr. Dobson: And it is saying bail out, isn't it?

Dennis Rainey: Big time. How you resolve conflict will determine whether or not you have a great marriage or not. And the tragic thing in families today is no one teaches us how to resolve conflict. In fact, if I'd have a little side, a soap box to get on over here for a second is I would be sure to teach my kids how to resolve conflict, because we have an enormous number of kids today being raised in homes who - are being raised in Christian homes - but don't have the foggiest idea about what Paul taught about how to resolve conflict. And I think the place that's hammered out is first, between husband and wife. We just talk about three things real quickly. Number one, listening to your mate, what's said and what's

not said, that'll take care of those differing assumptions. Okay? Number two, loving confrontation and boy, does Barbara do this with me. "Speaking the truth in love," Paul said.

Dr. Dobson: You want to demonstrate that Barbara? I would love to see you do that.

Barbara Rainey: You'd like to see that.

Dennis Rainey: Yeah, well she corrects me and I need it as a man because she has an objective set of eyes that look into my life and give me my most valued and treasured feedback that I get anywhere because I know she's committed to me. She loves me and she has my best interest at heart. Well, then a third thing in resolving conflict that I think's important is that of forgiveness. And we talk about in the book how you can know you've forgiven someone when you have given up the right of punishment, when you relinquish the right to club them with something. And I can't begin to emphasize this enough, because if you don't resolve those little differing assumptions and expectations, like you talked about, you build those over a lifetime and suddenly, you have walls that begin to emerge and that marriage rhythm bridges.

And I think that every time you resolve a conflict, you seek to chase down that peacemaker and usually peacemakers and troublemakers marry one another. One person who loves a good conflict married somebody who wants to escape it at all costs. And I think how you resolve that conflict really determines whether you have oneness or isolation in a marriage.

Dr. Dobson: Our chart said, "Forgiveness is giving up my right, my right to hurt you for hurting me." And that's good. You feel like you have a right to wound that person back.

Dennis Rainey: Absolutely.

Dr. Dobson: Forgiveness is saying, "I surrender that."

Dennis Rainey: And that's one of the things that is truly distinctive of a Christian marriage. How we're really different from the world is because we've been forgiven, we can forgive. Because of the cross I can give forgiveness and I can relinquish those rights.

Dr. Dobson: And that's right straight out of the word, isn't it?

Dennis Rainey: It is.

Dr. Dobson: Everything you teach is based on the word.

Dennis Rainey: I hope it is. That's the scripture of blueprints.

Dr. Dobson: We need to talk some more about this subject and let's do it next time, can we?

Dennis Rainey: Good.

Barbara Rainey: That would be great.

Roger Marsh: And we are looking forward to hearing the remainder of this conversation on tomorrow's edition of Family Talk. For this classic broadcast, Dr. Dobson's guests have been his good friends, Dennis and Barbara Rainey. Today's topic, loneliness in marriage, is a crucial one for husbands and wives alike. It impacts thousands of couples each and every day. Visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org to learn more about the Rainey's book on this subject, which is titled *Staying Close: Stopping the Natural Drift Toward Isolation in Marriage*. That's drjamesdobson.org and then click onto today's broadcast page.

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