



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The New Loneliness – Part 1

Guest(s): Cindi McMenamin

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- Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and thank you for joining us for this program.
- Roger Marsh: Well welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh sitting in the co-host seat today. In a world that is so technologically advanced, with so many social media sites meant to connect you with friends and loved ones near and far: Zoom, FaceTime, online gaming forums and more. Yet loneliness is still a big issue for a lot of people. According to studies over the years, about one out of every three adults has experienced loneliness or would describe themselves as lonely. And in mid-2023, the U.S. Surgeon General had issued a health alert that confirmed that there is "an epidemic of loneliness, a health risk of isolation, and a failure to connect deeply with others through friendships and risk of intimacy." Well today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, our guest for the program is going to speak into this issue. She is Cindi McMenamin. She's an award-winning writer and national speaker who is ministered to women for nearly 40 years. Cindi recently released a new book called *The New Loneliness: Nurturing Meaningful Connections When You Feel Isolated*. And that will be the topic of our conversation for the next couple of editions of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Cindi McMenamin, welcome to the Family Talk broadcast. We are delighted to have you with us today.
- Cindi McMenamin: Thank you. It's a delight to be with you as well.
- Roger Marsh: Well, thank you for sharing that. And now we're not lonely because having a conversation between the two of us, but loneliness is, it's different. I mean, you would think, as I mentioned in the intro, there are so many different ways for people to "connect," and yet you talk about the fact that asking the question, how did we get to this new state of loneliness? Give us a 35,000 foot overview of where you were heading with this new resource.
- Cindi McMenamin: 22 years ago, I wrote a book called *When Women Walk Alone*, and that's been my breakout book thus far. And I talked about how those alone times in our life can be doorways to a deeper intimacy with God. I met with my publisher a couple years ago the day after that Surgeon General Report came out and my editor asked, "Cindi, if you were to write *When Women Walk Alone* today, would you write it any differently?" And I said, wow. Actually I would because

there was no social media back then when I was talking about being alone. There was no post-COVID isolation habits that were still continuing. There was no preference of screens over faces or ultra reliance on high tech. And now the loneliness that people feel is exponential and there's always been loneliness. I believe anytime we are looking for something outside the realm of what God has offered us, but we can very subtly get wrapped up into this what I call the new loneliness as we are going along with our habits where we're not even aware of how little we are interacting one-on-one with people anymore. Most of the time it's between a screen.

Roger Marsh: Yeah. It's interesting how I was first made aware of this when I was having a conversation with one of my daughters. My kids are all adults now, but at this point we had been texting back and forth. We were at church one Sunday, we were just talking and they were describing our conversations via text messages as we were talking to each other. And I said, "Well, no, we weren't. We were sharing text messages." "No, we were talking." And that's how they equated communication with social media posts and texting and things like that. And I realized in reading your book, *The New Loneliness* that they were setting themselves up in the same way that a woman who gets a cheap cosmetic product and says, "Oh, I'm moisturizing my skin. As long as I put this stuff on every day, I'm fine." But when they run out of it, all of a sudden things start drying up. You begin to realize it really doesn't address the issue. And in some cases it actually, well, it sounds like the new loneliness is worse than just those moments when we used to experience the season of being on your own.

Cindi McMenamin: Oh yes. Because when we used to feel lonely, we'd think I need to be around people again. Now, I have an assessment test at the back of my book called "How Lonely Are You?" Many women have told me, "I started reading this book thinking I was going to help somebody else. I don't ever get lonely." And they said, "Then when I looked at those questions and honestly answered them, I realized I am lonelier than I realize. I am more connected to my phone, to my laptop screen than I am with people. It has been a while since I've had one-on-one or even sometimes group activities where I get real with somebody else." There's so much that's digital communication and not interpersonal or one-to-one communication.

Roger Marsh: Can we dig down on that a little bit more? Because I mean, I love the way you just described that, but we have really changed the language when it comes to loneliness and there are certain ways that we used to talk about people interacting with each other. And now we've taken these phrases and you write about this in your book, *The New Loneliness*. We've taken phrases that used to be technological terms, and yet that's how we're describing our interpersonal lives. It's like, wait, this is how we used to describe our computers or our devices. Now we're describing our friendships. Talk about how the language of loneliness has changed because you mentioned it's a subtle drift that we've seen happen over the past couple of decades, but give us a couple of concrete examples because I'm sure there are some people are saying, what are you talking about?

Cindi McMenamin: Yes, we now talk about our own lives as if we are devices rather than designed creation by God. We say things like, "Wow, I'm on overload. I need to defrag, or I need to recharge, or I've down my battery." We are not our phones, but that's how we talk. We even now say FaceTime, which is not literal FaceTime. It means you're seeing a face behind the screen. So many times, instead of thinking I need to refresh by being with God, we think, well, I need to again recharge the battery. We don't run on batteries.

We have souls, not digital code. And I think because tech has become so much a part of our lives that we then think connecting is because we emailed, or like you said, because we texted or because talked to somebody online. I had a discussion with another radio host who was telling me that she got back together at a reunion where they hadn't seen each other for 20 years, but they had the idea that they had simply because they had watched each other's Facebook posts, social media stuff. But they realized that's right, we haven't been in the same room. We haven't talked, we haven't heard each other's voices in all this time, but we were under the impression we had because we've been observing one another's lives, not participating in each other's lives.

Roger Marsh: Interesting. Interesting. Well, I think about that too. I mean, chances are, if those of us who are of a certain age are going to those reunions. They have zeros at the end of them for high school or college or church group or whatever it is. And when you get together, there are those certain people though I think we would all say, I've got the best friend. We don't talk to each other for maybe four or five years at a time, but every time I see them we just pick right up where we left off. And that's a real friendship. And we used to measure that I think tangibly and we could quantify it and qualify it. But nowadays, as you mentioned, you and I both run into people who are following us on social media and therefore they think they know. As a matter of fact, my wife just recently hit an educational milestone and we posted a couple pictures on Facebook and Instagram, and it was interesting to go through and see the people that either didn't really know us who were saying, "Hey, congratulations, way to go. We've been praying for you" which is kind of strange because we don't really know them personally, but other people who are close family members who are putting stickers up. And you're going, wait, where was the phone call? Where was the card in the mail? Where was the connection? And so it's almost like that new technological way of describing download and burnout and that type of thing really kind of fuels the fire for loneliness. There's got to be an antidote for that, isn't there?

Cindi McMenamin: And even sending a smiley face. Wow, how much better to just get together with that person and let them see a real smile.

Roger Marsh: Yes. And see yours, right?

Cindi McMenamin: Yes. And then in our minds we're thinking, oh, we've connected. I said something when I might've hit a like button. I remember having a conversation with my brother recently and I said, "I know you're busy, so I'll send a text and

then I don't hear from you." He says, yeah, sorry. I keep thinking that when I look at that and kind of laugh that you hear the chuckle, but then I remember if I don't actually say LOL, send a chuckle, or go, haha that was funny. You'll never know. And it's like, yeah, again, under the impression that we've connected or communicated when we haven't, and God created us for community. He didn't intend for us to live in this isolation that we're in and sometimes don't realize it.

Roger Marsh:

Cindi McMenemy is our guest today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. A brand-new book is called *The New Loneliness: Nurturing Meaningful Connections When You Feel Isolated*. And we have a link for the book up at drjamesdobson.org. Cindi, in this new work, you talk about anxiety and you have a great quote I'd like to share it with you and then have you react to it because I know that for a lot of women, especially, you can get caught in that tailspin of anxiety and Scripture says, hey, be strong and courageous. Perfect love casts out fear. The quote that I was taken with was, when you say, "Anxiety can take our hearts and minds hostage when we are not fully convinced that God is capable of taking care of whatever concerns us." Talk about how the social media world that we're living in right now fosters that to keep us away from people who God might be using to create a more meaningful sense of connection.

Cindi McMenemy:

Yeah. I even posted that quote on Facebook and got quite a bit of reaction. A lot of people are defensive when it comes to anxiety. "Anxiety, this is just the way I am. Anxiety is a mental illness, a disorder, a this and that." And I'm not arguing that, but the Word clearly says, "Be anxious for nothing, and instead, let your request be made known to God." Pray about it. "Worry about nothing, and pray about everything," is the New Living Translation of that verse in Philippians. And I am convinced that when we remember God is with me, He is for me. He has a reason why I'm here, that can distill the worry, that can distill that fear that eventually turns into anxiety. In my own life, if I start anticipating the future, if I start in with the what ifs, if I start trying to think, how can I control this and realize I can't, anxiety can rush in and I have to stop and go, "Wait, God is just as present in my life as He always has been."

But again, with tech, what can we do? Consult Google rather than talking to God. Put something out on social media and see what other people say. Where is that place where we quiet our hearts and say, "God, calm my heart with the reminder You are here. You are with me. You are for me. You have a reason why I'm going through these circumstances that I'm in." We have to constantly remember that and go back to the facts of God's Word rather than our feelings, which again, are so perpetuated now in social media and everywhere we go online.

Roger Marsh:

It's interesting, Cindi, one of the things you write about in your new book, you talk about the fact that you had a season where you were going through some health issues. And I know a lot of times the social media world is a place where the health issues can really get blown out of proportion. Let's all pray for my friends, friends, friends, friends, friends, friends', daughter. You want to be a

person of prayer, but at the same time it's like how much of these are "prayer concerns" and how much of this is kind of gossip? And at the same time, what happens then when you start playing the comparison game saying, "Hey, I'm going in for a biopsy. I could use your prayer" and 14 people like it. Or they give you some praying hands and you're like, wait, my problem isn't as good as somebody else's is. Talk about what it's like for you. I mean the health issues were very, very concerning and it can lead to not only the suffering part, but also loss and loneliness that come along with that season.

Cindi McMenamin: Yes. When I first had this biopsy and when we thought it might be cancer and immediately you can go to the what ifs, and for me it was just having to remember this did not take God by surprise. I had to constantly be in that situation again, knowing he is with me, he is for me. Is it a coincidence that I just got a book contract and there was something on this biopsy? God knows what He's doing in this. I remember one time as I was dealing with that, my brother had actually texted and he had said, "How are you doing? Are you keeping your thoughts from running wild?"

I remembered that verse, and I believe in 1 Corinthians about taking every thought captive into the obedience of Christ. And he told me, he said, "We're in a military training seminar right now and we are learning from military special forces that fear is not reality. Fear is when we imagine the future." I thought, wow. That's true in physical warfare as well as spiritual warfare that we live in imagining the future rather than staying present where God is with us and He's already seen the future. So yeah, there had to be a lot of going back to the Word of God, but also there were times when I just needed to connect with another person. When I found out I might have to go on medication for the rest of my life, I was beside myself. I've never been really anxious before and all of a sudden, it's like what? I did everything so this wouldn't have to happen. And I suddenly remembered a friend of mine, in fact, she might have just emailed or texted at the same time, and I said, can we get together and talk? We could have done that just little text thing back and forth. Let me tell you, there was something about sitting down with her, hearing the tone of her voice, having her reach out and touch my hand. "Can I pray with you right here?" I felt so strengthened, so equipped from that time one-on-one with a sister in Christ. And I began to remember God has given me the body of Christ all around me. And yes, tech can be helpful at times. If we're feeling alone, we can reach out to other people. But there is something that happens, I believe I call 'em divine appointments when we rub shoulders with one another, when we're able to hug another believer, when we show up in that assembly of believers rather than being a participant on our couch and watching that service online. God has that dynamic with the body of Christ to help us through those situations and He knows exactly what we need.

Roger Marsh: And that's incredible that you're sharing this because I was thinking about how I had a similar experience when I found out I needed open heart surgery and I knew a friend of mine who'd had a quintuple bypass about two years prior, and I called him. We hadn't seen each other in a couple of years, and I said, "Hey,

can you get coffee with me? I'm going to be having this surgery." And we just sat there and we talked about music, we talked about sports, we talked about politics. We didn't talk about the medical side because I didn't know what it was like for him to go through what he went through. And he didn't know what I was about to go through other than we both had scars on our chest from having our chest cracked. But I didn't realize in that moment how much that helped me in my recovery thinking about that conversation, knowing there was somebody else who understood.

And as you're describing your situation and saying, hey that face-to-face, there's something about the warmth of that communication and that connection, it really does help. And it kind of also addresses part of this new loneliness that you write about in your book called *The New Loneliness*. The fact that what social media does for us now, in addition to making us think technologically about human issues, but it also creates this kind of false measuring stick, if you will, in terms of where you are in life. Am I keeping up with the Joneses goes into a whole different dimension online. Talk about the comparison game, if you will, what that does to the loneliness component for especially for women who are saying, "Wow, I want to have the perfect Pinterest home and family, but it's just not working out for me compared to all these other women I see online."

Cindi McMenamin: Yes, there is a reason those statistics are out there that the more time we spend on social media, the more depressed we are, the less content we are with life and the lonelier we are. And you're touching on it here because that sense of inadequacy, sense of insignificance, that comparison and competition that women tend to do, especially among each other. We are very critical of ourselves, we're critical of others, and we try to compete. And when we're doing that, we aren't able to break out of that loneliness because it's an isolating thing. Women don't like when other people compare and compete with them either and I think that isolates us even further. And that's why in that chapter on the loneliness of inadequacy and comparison, I talk about how crucial it is to know who we are in God's eyes, to know our significance in Him, so that if we approached the whole social media or just friendships and relationships with, how can I encourage this person? How can I build them up rather than how can they affirm me? How can I feel better by feeling like I've achieved more than them? We will understand a whole lot more about deeper friendships and we won't be as lonely. For one thing, we're letting God feel that loneliness factor because we're understanding how precious we are and how perfectly and wonderfully made we are in His sight, and then we're seeking to build up others and that ends up building us up as well I believe

Roger Marsh: You have a quote in your book, *The New Loneliness* that reads, "If we try to reach the enough stage without God, without Him, our pursuit will always end in disappointment." And yet here we are in a culture right now. If I hear this one more time, I think I'm going to tear what's left of my hair out, and that is I deserve this. You hear this especially from young people, "I deserve to be happy. I deserve to be in love, I deserve." And my pastor's heart says, "You

deserve Hell without Jesus.” I mean, but I realize that when it comes to that, self-confidence has kind of been replaced by self-love, hasn't it?

Cindi McMenamin: Oh yes. And self-respect has been confused with self-love. And self-preference is usually right in there with self-love. And it's not what Jesus taught. He taught sacrificial love. So I address that in the book as well because when we buy this idea in society that we are the single most important person in our lives and we must love ourselves first in order for that love to flow out to others. Oh no, we tend to love ourselves too much. That's the problem. When we love God first, that's the love that flows out to others. We have to have that priority relationship right, and Jesus, then others, then you. What a great way to spell joy. That song, that is still true. Culture says that's wrong. It's you first and then others, Jesus said die to self. He said, sacrificially love. prefer one another in love. So that's a touchy topic. Women don't like it, but culture in trying to make people feel better will say, you are the single most important person in your life. You think of you first. Yes, there have been situations where abuse and manipulation has happened when women have not understood their value in God's eyes. And yet that whole thing of looking out for number one, ourselves, is what ruins relationships. Many times it's what ruins marriages. It's what divides families. And when we learn that sacrificial love for God that I am fully confident in who I am in God, so I can take the backseat and serve you in love, that's when those relationships deepen. That's when true connection really happens.

Roger Marsh: It's so interesting if you put the apostle Paul's words into practice in the right place, “As much as it pertains to you, live peaceably with all people,” understanding that you do have to take care of your own, take care of your body and that type of thing, but at the same time understanding that other people are going to do what they're going to do. And you don't always have to go chasing around after toxic relationships. But as you're describing, there's a big difference between self-respect and self-love.

Cindi McMenamin: Yes, my husband and I have been married 37 years. He's a pastor, but those marriages have stress on them. If I was the single most important person in my life and I put myself first, I would not be in this marriage today because that doesn't build a marriage. But God lovingly and graciously teaches us what it means to die to self in marriage and that can be a beautiful thing. I wouldn't have a relationship with my daughter if I put myself first. I can be very, very selfish if Jesus isn't on the throne of my life. And that's why we can be very, very lonely too if we continue to put ourselves first.

Roger Marsh: Well, Cindi McMenamin has written a great new book. It's called *The New Loneliness: Nurturing Meaningful Connections When You Feel Isolated*. We have a link for the book up at drjamesdobson.org. And Cindi, we were just kind of scratching the surface on this book. We've run out of time for today, but can you come back again next time so we can continue this conversation?

Cindi McMenamin: I would love to.

Roger Marsh:

Boy what a powerful quote: “We have confused self-respect with self-love.” Boy that is a tension we all feel, isn't it? Our culture keeps telling us to prioritize ourselves, and yet, Jesus calls us to put others first. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, featuring a compelling conversation with author Cindi McMenemy about navigating loneliness in our hyperconnected world. Now, if you missed any part of today's broadcast or if you'd like to share it with a friend, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And while you're there, be sure you also check out a couple of resources we have available for you: Cindi McMenemy's new book called *The New Loneliness: Nurturing Meaningful Connections When You Feel Isolated*, as well as her brand-new devotional that just came out called *The New Loneliness Devotional: 50 Days to a Closer Connection with God*. You'll find information on how you can order either or both of these resources when you go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

Now, if today's conversation about connection and relationships has got you thinking about your own marriage, I want to share with you about a powerful free resource created just for you. It's called “Conflict in Marriage.” It's a short email series from the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute based on the heartfelt opinions, thoughts, and insights of Dr. James Dobson along with clinical research to back it up. If you've ever wondered, these are some of the most pressing questions couples face and we hear them here at the JDFI all the time. For example, why do my husband and I argue when neither one of us really wants to? Or why do my wife and I have these conflicts that might seem normal to some people but are they a sign of a deeper issue? What does it mean to disagree the right way in marriage? These insights are designed to guide you and your spouse toward a stronger, more connected relationship. And in a world where screens have replaced face-to-face conversation, this short email series can help you rediscover the kind of authentic intimacy that Cindi McMenemy was talking about today. Again, it's a free email series. Dr. James Dobson's “Conflict in Marriage” email series and to sign up, all you have to do is go to drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org.

Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we are working tirelessly to bring you and your family practical biblical truth that breaks through the noise of our confused culture. Every broadcast you hear, every resource we create, every family we encourage, it is all made possible because people like you choose to stand with us. Now, if you have benefited from hearing today's conversation, would you consider partnering with our ministry? Your gift today of any amount helps us continue bringing biblical hope and practical wisdom to millions of listeners. And right now, thanks to our special \$6 million matching grant, every donation up to \$6 million will be doubled dollar for dollar. Now you can make a secure donation online when visit drjamesdobson.org. You can also speak with a member of our constituent care team when you call 877-732-6825. They'll be happy to handle that transaction over the phone. 877-732-6825.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of all of us here at the JDFI, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here as Cindi

McMenamin continues to share more insights on the new loneliness. That's coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you can still trust, for the family you love.

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.