

Social Anxiety – Why should I worry what you think of me?

Introduction

Who is this nervous wreck?

What is Social Anxiety?

Social anxiety is feeling nervous, fearful, and physically tense in situations that involve other people. (Every one of us can identify on some level with this experience.)

From being mildly shy and inhibited in new and unfamiliar settings



At its most serious social anxiety can be debilitating and distressing, leaving people unable to carry out even the most normal daily activities

What does social anxiety feel like?

Why are social situations so distressing?

What social qualities does our world value and desire?

- We live in an extrovert world
- Strengths and weaknesses
- What should our speech sound like

God's Presence – Exodus 3:11-12

What questions do we raise about ourselves in social situations in which we feel anxious?

- A legitimate question
- The crucial question

Despising Shame – Hebrews 12:2

What questions do other people raise about us in social situations?

- Why do we fear other people?
- Ultimate humiliation and shame

Serving Others – Leviticus, Romans & Ephesians

- Think community
- Freedom from the court room
- Unity sets us free to serve

Case Study

Gerry is a quiet man. He is in his mid forties, married with three noisy and lively children. He works as a financial analysis and spends much of his day in front of a computer screen. He feels safe there, no one is peering over his shoulder. He is well liked and respected by his colleagues but often finds himself on the fringes of office socialising. This may be because he keeps himself in the background, listening to conversations rather than participating. He fears that if his colleagues really got to know him they would discover he isn't as clever as he seems. His anxiety becomes particularly acute when in team meetings and there is pressure to contribute. He respects his boss and desires to please him but more often than not he feels like a bumbling fool.

There is one colleague who Gerry particularly fears and he is a man people listen to and follow. Gerry often finds himself disagreeing with this man but is afraid to speak up in meetings. This colleague is articulate, good with words but when Gerry speaks he stutters and loses his train of thought another reason why he prefers to keep quiet. It is partly this reason Gerry comes to you looking for help. He has become dissatisfied sitting in the background and has noticed that this pattern exists in all areas of his life. He doesn't interact much around the family dinner table preferring to allow others to talk. During a recent family holiday the hotel they had stayed at hadn't been up to scratch. Gerry wanted to challenge the hotel staff about the poor service but he bottled it.

Sundays are a constant source of social anxiety for Gerry. At church he desires to talk with those around him but often feels awkward and embarrassed when conversations quickly dry up. The silence is excruciating with the result he assumes people will think he is boring and avoid him. He sometimes notices they are looking around for someone more interesting to talk with. He has observed that given the choice people tend to prefer to sit next to more high profile members of the congregation than him. His worst fear is standing alone while everyone is in conversation around him. His tactic to avoid looking lonely is to pull out his phone and check his messages.

Occasionally Gerry's pastor asks him to lead prayers during the service. This usually results in Gerry spending the rest of the service wondering if his prayer made the grade. He berates himself for not preparing thoroughly enough. He thinks about whether his prayer was long enough, theology correct and how did it compare to Andrew's prayer last week. Gerry remembers seeing his pastor enthusiastically slap Andrew on the back after the service had ended.

- What does Gerry fear?
- Which situation would you seek to address Gerry's social anxiety and why?
- What would the small steps of change look like for Gerry?