

Helping People Overcome Anxiety and Fear

1. Introduction –

- a. Why are we spending time studying these issues today?

- b. We are also looking at these things today because we believe that the Bible hold all of the answers for the issues of life.

2. The Bible is Source for Helping Others

- a. Biblical counseling is based on fundamental beliefs about the Bible.
 - i. Inspired – 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:16-21

1 Tim 3:16-17, “¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

- ii. Inerrant – Psalms 19:7-14; Matt 5:17-18; 1 Peter 1:23-25

Ps 19:7a, “The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;”

- iii. Authoritative – 1 Thess 2:13; Titus 2:15

1 Thess 2:13, “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”

- iv. Sufficient – Ps 19:7-14; Ps 119; 2 Tim 3:16-17

Ps 119:9, “How can a young man keep his way pure?
By keeping *it* according to Your word.”

v. Understandable – 2 Peter 3:15-16; 2 Tim 2:15; Ps 119:130

2 Tim 2:15, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”

3. Finding True Hope Amid a Crisis

a. Hope is not found in circumstances

i. Biblical hope is an effectual confidence in God and especially His promises and the fulfillment of them. God will always do what He says.

b. Hope in the sovereignty of God

i. Romans 8:28-29, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren”

ii. Matthew 6:25-34

iii. God is in complete and total control over all things in the universe. I can trust and have hope in knowing that no matter what God is doing, he is aware of it and is control of it.

c. Hope for the present and future by looking in the past

i. Romans 15:4, “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

d. Hope ultimately found in Christ – there is no hope outside of the gospel.

i. His living

ii. His dying

1. Christ, out of love for you and for me, and a love and desire for the Father to be honored and worshipped, Christ bore the penalty for

your sin and my sin. Christ, by his dying on the cross for sin, took all the punishment, all the wrath, all of the pain that we should experience.

2. There is not one thing you or I can do to earn God's favor. The only way for us to be in right standing or right relationship with Him is by placing our faith, our trust in Christ for what he has done to pay the penalty for sin.

iii. His return

1. Lastly, our trust hope is found in Christ's coming back to earth to set up his kingdom. Hope that one day all that is painful and difficult in this life will be dealt with and will no longer be a reality.

4. What are Anxiety and Fear?

a. Definitions

- i. Anxiety is a feeling of agitation, unease, or concern about an imminent event with an uncertain outcome. Often associated with something in the future (Matt 6:25).

- ii. "To divide, part, rip, tear apart, to be unduly concerned, distract your attention." (Matt 6:31)

1. "Anxiety is, at its core, an inappropriate response in light of circumstances; it's very different from the cares and concerns in life that cause people to attend to business in a responsible way."¹

- iii. Anxiety rips into our hearts and minds and tears our attention away from what we need to be thinking about in trying situations.

¹ John MacArthur, *Found: God's Peace: Experience True Freedom from Anxiety in Every Circumstance*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook), location 20, Kindle.

- iv. Fear can be described as an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat.
- v. Both of these are an unpleasant emotion. And we will see that as we continue our time together that these emotions are responses that are directly related to our thinking and our desires.
 1. Fear, like anxiety, is not a thing but a response to life. Fear grips the lives of many people without them really knowing it. Fear is a strong emotion and it is often not based on any real danger. However, while we often know that our fears may not be logical, the experience is no less difficult and life is still hard.
 2. Like a slave master, fear is controlling. “Extreme displays of anxiety are often related to an unfounded fear so overwhelming and so overpowering that it clutches a person’s heart, forces the heart to beat faster, produces chills or perspiration, and makes the person feel completely unable to cope with the moment.”²
 3. There can be a good side of fear, however.
 - a. Reasonable fear of danger or difficulty (Ps 56:3)
 - i. We don’t jump out of an airplane with a parachute
 - ii. We don’t go swimming in a pool of great white sharks
 - iii. We wash our hands to help prevent sickness
 - iv. However, those reasonable fears can often times be so exaggerated that they lead to crippling anxiety.
 - b. Fear of God (Ps 115:11; 27:1-2; Jer 16:11-13; Rev 2-3) – The fear of God is the worship of God. What we fear is what our minds turn to and our lives are dictated by.
 - c. Prov 1:7 – the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom

² John MacArthur, *Found: God's Peace: Experience True Freedom from Anxiety in Every Circumstance*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook), location 9, Kindle.

d. Prov 10:27 – Fearing God lengthens our lives

5. What Does the Bible Say about Anxiety and Fear?

Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? ²⁷ And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? ²⁸ And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, ²⁹ yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith! ³¹ Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Philippians 4:4-9

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is ^[c]lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. ⁹ The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

- a. Anxious and fearful thoughts and are directly related to our thinking (Gen 12:11-13; Rom 12:1-2; Eph 4:23; Phil 4:8). What we fear shows what we are giving much of thoughts and attention to. Wrong or misinformed thoughts lead to fear.
 - i. Many people think that anxiety comes as a result of too much thinking and they just need to stop thinking. The real issue is that they are not thinking

enough on the right thing. It is too much thinking, not it is not enough thinking on the goodness and faithfulness of God.

- ii. “Faith, according to our Lord’s teaching ... is primarily thinking.... We must spend more time in studying our Lord’s lessons in observation and deduction. The Bible is full of logic, and we must never think of faith as something purely mystical. We do not just sit down in an armchair and expect marvelous things to happen to us. That is not Christian faith. Christian faith is essentially thinking. Look at the birds, think about them, and draw your deductions. Look at the grass, look at the lilies of the field, consider them.... Faith, if you like, can be defined like this: It is a man insisting upon thinking when everything seems determined to bludgeon and knock him down.... The trouble with the person of little faith is that, instead of controlling his own thought, his thought is being controlled by something else, and, as we put it, he goes round and round in circles. That is the essence of worry.... That is not thought; that is the absence of thought, a failure to think.”³ – Martyn Lloyd Jones

- b. Our anxiety and fear often focuses on the circumstances rather than on God (Ps 46:1-2; Gen 32:7-12; Num 13:25-14:5; Ps 55:22; Mark 4:35-41).

Ps 46:1-2, “God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.
²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change
And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea;”

- c. When we are anxious and fearful, we are focusing on self (Phil 2:4; Ps 46:1-2). Especially in this increasingly chaotic and changing world we live in, it is easy to get caught in the circumstances and focus on our protection.
 - i. These thoughts are also often gripped with a desire to seek to change or control the situations we are in.
 - ii. We are also seeking in our anxiety and fear to flee the things we are scared of. For many that is pain, discomfort, and death. But as we see in many places in the Bible, God uses the trials and pain to grow us.

³ Ibid, locations 386-398, Kindle.

1. James 1:2-4, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”
 2. Romans 5:3-4, “And not only this, but ^[c]we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;”
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- d. Anxiety and fear often motivates us to commit other sins (Gal 2:12).
 - i. We may give in to anger as well during times of fear or anxiety.
 - ii. We may seek to run to other things for relief, pleasure, comfort rather than to the Lord.
 - e. Not being right with God leads to anxiety and fear (Ps 38:17-18; Prov 4:23; 28:1).
 - f. Being anxious or fearful does not change the situation, nor does it accomplish anything worthwhile (Matt 6:27).
 - g. Anxiety and fear are **always** engaged in loving something else other than God (Prov 14:26-17; 29:25; Matt 6:31-33; 10:28; Gal 1:10; 2:12; Heb 13:5-6; 1 Peter 3:13-14). What we fear shows us what we worship. We are all created to worship God, but because of sin, we now naturally worship someone or something else. Most fundamentally you could say that anxiety and fear are unbelief, and therefore sin.
 - i. When our lives seem in control and from our perspective life is going how we think it should, then we have some semblance of peace. But when circumstances change, then we become anxious and fearful.

- ii. What we once looked to for comfort and peace and safety is now taken away. Whether it be a job, your health, a home, bank account, having enough toilet paper and hand sanitizer, or whatever else, when these things are taken away, our hearts are exposed.

- iii. A helpful way to think about anxiety and fear is to imagine it like a smoke alarm of the soul. When we become anxious, we need to stop and think about what is going on in our hearts our souls.

- iv. Hope comes from seeing anxiety as sin because God has saved us from our sin.
 - 1. Christ's death on our behalf has paved the way for us to be able to not merely cope with, but to overcome our anxiety (2 Cor 5:21).
 - 2. If anxiety is something that God has been commanded us not to do, He will give us the grace to overcome it (1 Cor 10:13; 2 Tim 3:16-17).

6. The Heart of Anxiety and Fear

a. Biblical view of why we do what we do

i. Mark 7:20-23

²⁰ And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²² deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. ²³ All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

ii. Proverbs 4:23

Watch over your heart with all diligence,
For from it *flow* the springs of life.

iii. Jeremiah 17:9

“The heart is more deceitful than all else
And is desperately sick;
Who can understand it?”

iv. Heb. 4:12

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

b. Understanding the heart

i. The mind, will and emotions

ii. Involves inclinations, resolutions, determinations, passions, and desires

iii. The seat of all thought, feeling, reason, and motives

c. Some conclusions about the heart

i. The “heart” is not fundamentally good.

ii. Even as a “new creation in Christ” you struggle with unruly wants, sinful desires, wrong drives, “needs,” sinful passions, misplaced expectations, “remnant sin.” Sanctification still has to happen in the heart.

iii. Your “heart” is alive not empty or passive

iv. It takes work to understand—Proverbs 20:5

A plan in the heart of a man is *like* deep water,
But a man of understanding draws it out.

d. It’s really all about worship

i. We were made to be worshipers of the true and living God

ii. Romans 11:36

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

- iii. I Cor. 10:31
Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
- iv. 2 Cor. 5:9
Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.
- v. We turn to other things (other “gods”). What are substitute gods called?
Romans 1:25

“An idol of the heart is *anything that rules me other than God* [his emphasis]. As worshiping beings, human beings always worship someone or something. This is not a situation where some people worship and some people don’t. If God isn’t ruling my heart, someone or something will. It is the way we were made” (Paul Tripp *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*).

