Overcoming Anxiety

Prepared by Nathan L Morrison for Sunday October 15th, 2023

Text: Philippians 4:6-19; Scripture Reading: I Peter 5:6-7

### Intro

1. Anxiety. Anxiousness.
   1. According to psychology, anxiety is a normal and adaptive emotional response that involves feelings of distress, worry, and physiological symptoms in the context of apprehensively anticipating future danger or misfortune. However, when anxiety becomes excessive and interferes with daily functioning, it can be considered an anxiety disorder.
      1. <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/treatment-tests-and-therapies/how-to-help-someone-with-anxiety>
2. People get anxious (worried, stressed) over many things:
   1. The war in Ukraine. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was cited as a cause for young people feeling distressed and a loss of well-being as reported in Psychology Today by Tyler J. VanderWeele Ph.D. titled: Why Young People's Mental Well-Being Is in Such Decline
      1. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/human-flourishing/202208/why-young-peoples-mental-well-being-is-in-such-decline>
   2. Israel was attacked by Hamas Saturday October 7th, 2023. A rally at Columbia University that drew hundreds of pro-Palestinian protesters on October 11, 2023, who chanted slogans such as “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” and “Zionism is racism.” Pro-Israeli protesters showed up as well and the clash was so great that Columbia University closed its campus October 12 as both sides divide the city!
      1. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/12/nyregion/columbia-university-israel-hamas-protests.html>
      2. A surprising amount of support for Hamas and Palestinians is rising among college students, aged 18-25. A debate of what is “free Speech” and what is” unacceptable speech” is raging across university campuses in our country.
      3. The influence of social media and online activism, which have amplified the voices and perspectives of Palestinians and their supporters, as well as exposed the graphic images and videos of the violence and suffering in Gaza and Israel. The article quotes a Palestinian-American student who said that social media was “the only way we can get our narrative out.”
      4. <https://www.nytimes.com/topic/organization/hamas>
   3. Anxiety over day-to-day things:
      1. Family stress: spouse relationships, children relationships, in-laws, etc.
      2. Work stress
      3. Financial stress
      4. House or home stress
      5. Relationship stress in general: friends, co-workers, dating, online, etc.
   4. Anxiety, according to Dr. Joseph McGuire, Ph.D., doesn’t always present with physical symptoms so he says, “People are often dismissive of people experiencing anxiety.” This, in turn, causes more anxiety for those experiencing it.
      1. <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/treatment-tests-and-therapies/how-to-help-someone-with-anxiety>
      2. A person can become so anxious that there are physical symptoms, such as:
         1. Lightheadedness
         2. Sweating
         3. Nausea
         4. Feeling edgy and/or restless/sleepless
         5. Shortness of breath
         6. Diarrhea
         7. Getting easily fatigued
      3. Another way to tell if you or a loved one is anxious, is what you think about and how you communicate it:
         1. Believing the worst will happen
         2. Persistent worry
         3. All-or-nothing thinking
         4. Overgeneralizing (making overall assumptions based on a single event)
      4. Dr. McGuire says, “Perhaps what you’ll notice most is your loved one’s behaviors.” Common anxiety behaviors include:
         1. Avoidance of feared situations or events
         2. Seeking reassurance
         3. Second-guessing
         4. Irritability and frustration in feared situations
         5. Compulsive actions (like washing hands over and over)
      5. Anxiety, if not resolved or restrained, can cause loss of sleep and physical ailments.
   5. Psychology Professionals treat anxiety in two ways and they say the best way is a combo approach:
      1. One of the most common and successful treatments for anxiety disorders is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT is a form of psychotherapy that helps patients identify and challenge their irrational thoughts, learn to cope with their emotions, and gradually face their fears in a safe and supportive environment.
      2. Another treatment option for anxiety disorders is medication management with antidepressants4. Antidepressants can help reduce the severity of anxiety symptoms and improve mood and functioning.
      3. Research shows that combining medication with CBT can produce better outcomes than either treatment alone. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anxiety/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20350967>
3. Professional Help has its place, but we can turn to the Great Physician to see what Jesus said on the matter and to the apostle Paul who had a lot to say about anxiety!
4. Don’t Worry
5. Jesus addressed anxious concerns of everyday life…
   1. Matthew 6:25-34: Jesus said, “Who of you by being worried *(Greek word for anxiety, merimnao, Gr. 3309),* can add a single hour to his life?” *(Matthew 6:27)*
   2. He told them, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” *(Matthew 6:33)*
   3. Jesus says to obey God, be in the right relationship with God first, and then trust in God to provide help for you.
6. Paul addresses the concerns of anxiety…
   1. The letter to the Philippians reads like a Mission Report from Paul, and after two of my own overseas preaching trips, I relate to this letter even more.
   2. Philippians 4:10-20: He thanks them for their support and tells them he had “received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied” (Philippians 4:18).
   3. Paul knew what it was like to feel anxious and stressed (II Corinthians 11:23-28).
      1. He says, “I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.
      2. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches” (II Corinthians 11:27-28).
7. Paul addresses the concerns of anxiety and tells these good brethren who have helped him and amply supplied him in his preaching how to overcome anxiety!

#### Prayer: God’s Cure For Anxiety

* 1. Philippians 4:6-7: Prayer is the antidote to anxiety, stress, and worry.
  2. God says, “Be anxious for nothing.”
     1. “Anxious” is *Gr. merimnao (Str. 3309):* “to be anxious, to have worry; to draw in different directions.”
  3. How to avoid it (Note: contrast “But” in Phil. 4:6): In everything pray!
     1. Luke 18:1-8: Jesus taught His disciples with a parable that they were in all things to pray, so that they may not “lose heart.”
  4. How to pray?
     1. With supplications: That is beseeching and imploring.
     2. Give thanks: *Colossians 3:17: We are to be thankful to God through Christ!*
     3. Make requests to God: to make petitions (I Peter 5:6-7).
  5. The result: God’s peace!
     1. It will guard our hearts and minds!
     2. It seems so simple: “Just pray!”
     3. Remember what Jesus said back in Matthew 6:
        1. “…do not be worried about your life” *(same word in Philippians 4:6-7: merimnao,Gr. 3309) – Matthew 6:25*
        2. “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? – Matthew 6:26
        3. “You of little faith!” – Matthew 6:30
        4. “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” – Matthew 6:32
        5. “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself” – Matthew 6:34
     4. Jesus says have faith, be obedient (Matthew 6:33), and trust that God knows you need these things.
     5. Paul says, “Pray!” We pray because Jesus assured us that God already knows!
     6. Peter says to pray!
        1. I Peter 5:6-7: Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety *(Gr. 3308 merimnah, root word of 3309 merimnao: anxiety, cares, burdens)* on Him, because He cares for you.
        2. Here, we are told to pray because Jesus cares for us! It’s what Jesus said back in Matthew 6!
  6. By praying to God, laying upon Him our cares & anxieties, we can have the peace of God that is only found in Jesus!

#### Think Positively!

1. Philippians 4:8-9: 6 specific things are to engage our thoughts…
   * 1. True things – God’s word is truth (John 17:17)
     2. Honorable things – Dwelling on those things that are noble, honest, true.
     3. Right things – Things that are just, without deceit, or fraud (I Peter 2:1-3).
     4. Pure things – The mind must be fed pure thoughts (Matthew 5:27-28; Hebrews 4:12).
     5. Lovely things – Things which call forth love.
     6. Good Repute – Good report matters, things of excellence that are worthy of praise!
        1. Philippians 1:10: They were to “approve excellent things” so that they would be found “sincere and blameless” on the day of Christ.
2. Put this into practice!
   * 1. Paul says not only to dwell and think on good things, but practice them!
     2. Our thoughts influence our actions – Mark 7:20-23: Jesus said,
        1. And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”
     3. So it is important that our thoughts are pure and focused on honorable things!
3. If we fill our mind with positive thinking we won’t have time for worry and anxiety!

#### Thanksgiving

1. Philippians 4:10-19: Paul gives further reasons for his rejoicing by giving thanks to the Philippians for their financial help in his work.
2. Contentment – Philippians 4:10-13
   * 1. He says he *learned* (practiced) to be content no matter what his circumstances.
     2. He was content both in poverty and prosperity.
     3. Poverty (tough times) can cause some to be anxious (stressed, worried).
        1. Financial stress is the number one issue married couples fight over, and the second leading cause of divorce. <https://www.ramseysolutions.com/company/newsroom/releases/money-ruining-marriages-in-america>
     4. Philippians 4:13: Paul said he could find contentment by the strength found in Christ!
3. Giving thanks – Philippians 4:14-18
   * 1. When stressed it is hard to think of others.
     2. Paul is in a Roman prison and wants to make sure he thanks the Philippians for their help!
     3. He thought of others and rejoiced in their care and concern for him.
     4. Paul says they alone helped him – it is easy to feel anxious if alone (loneliness can cause great pain). Paul recognizes he wasn’t alone (He had the care of the Philippian saints and God).
     5. When we give thanks we shift our care and anxiety off our selves and our own problems to think of others.
     6. We can think of those who have helped us, both past and present, and we can remember God who knows what we need and cares for us!
4. Reap what we sow – Philippians 4:17, 19
   * 1. Paul said he rejoiced more in the fact that they gave than in the gift itself!
     2. Reason: *God would supply their needs!*
     3. When they supported Paul they shared in preaching the gospel (Phil. 1:5; 4:14).
     4. Galatians 6:6-9: We reap what we sow. The Philippians did good to Paul and he told them they would receive good from God!
     5. II Corinthians 9:6: In giving (sacrificing) our means the law of sowing and reaping applies! (II Cor. 8:1-5: Macedonians wanted to give to the saints in Jerusalem even though they suffered “deep poverty” and they gave willingly!)
5. Learning to be content and giving thanks for what we have will keep us from anxiety!

## Conclusion

1. It is easy to worry over the cares of this life.
   1. Family stress, work stress, the pain of war and loss can all contribute to a stressful life.
2. The hard thing we are called upon to do is to be different: to NOT worry!
3. Jesus said to not worry, but instead, focus on God’s kingdom and righteousness – Matthew 6:33
4. Paul said to not worry, but instead, in all things pray & lean on Christ’s strength – Philippians 4:6, 13
5. Peter said to not worry but give it to God because He cares for us – I Peter 5:6-7
   1. What an awesome statement: Give it to God!
   2. He is bigger than us or our problems
   3. He wants to take it from you
   4. He wants you to give it to Him because He cares for you!
6. *Bobby McFerrin sang to the world, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” in 1988’s Reggae Hit!*
7. Anxiety can be overcome if we apply God’s antidotes:
   1. Pray
   2. Think positively
   3. Give thanks and be content!
8. Not only are we to know to do it, but “practice these things!” *(Philippians 4:9)*
9. In overcoming anxiety, God’s peace will guard (protect) our hearts and mind!
10. If you are not a Christian, you need to be. Repent and be baptized into His name!
11. If a Christian in error, don’t wait till it’s eternally too late. Repent and be renewed!
12. Whatever your requests, let them be made known ***NOW*** while we stand & sing!