

## The Mind of Christ pt. 1

### Anxiety

#### I. Introduction

- A. May is mental health awareness month. I felt led to share some biblical insights regarding common mental health issues. I fear that modern Christians have almost completely ignored and minimized these struggles. Too many people feel as if they are struggling alone, that even their friends, families, and church cannot deal with mental health issues. I believe that the Bible is sufficient for every part of the Christian life, even the hard things.
- B. If you, or someone you love, is struggling with mental health issues I want to create a culture in our church of compassion, grace, and biblical wisdom to help.
- C. Over the next few Sundays we will examine what the Bible teaches about anxiety, depression, grief, and addiction. Each week I will provide a definition of the issue, biblical demonstrations of it, and biblical counsel on how to defend against it.

#### II. Definition

- A. The primary word in the New Testament that describes “anxiety or care” is “*merimna*” (3308) and means “to draw in different directions” which signifies ‘that which causes this [feeling], a care, especially an anxious care.’ (Vine’s Dictionary, pg. 89)
- B. Another word that could be applicable in the New Testament is the word “*phobos*” from which we get the term “phobia.” This word describes ‘fear, dread, terror’ (Vine’s, pg. 230)
- C. “Anxiety is an inner feeling of apprehension, uneasiness, worry, and/or dread that is accompanied by a heightened physical [response]. In times of anxiety, the body appears to be on alert, ready to flee or fight. The heart beats faster, blood pressure and muscle tension increase, neurological and chemical changes occur within, and the person may feel faint, jumpy, and unable to relax or sleep.” (*Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*, pg. 140 - 141)
  - 1. Anxiety can be as simple as a state of unease or heightened stress.
  - 2. Anxiety can be a constant feeling of dread, crippling fear, or alertness.
  - 3. Anxiety can be as bad as debilitating panic attacks and PTSD.
  - 4. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults (19.1% of the population) age 18 and older every year. (<https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/facts-statistics>)
- D. It’s worth noting that not all anxiety is a bad thing. God created our bodies to respond with healthy fear in situations of legitimate danger. Consider the way your body responds when you are driving and a car comes into your lane. Adrenaline floods your brain and your reflexes and awareness are heightened. This is meant to protect us from harm and is actually a good thing. The anxiety I am talking about is an unhealthy anxiety. The key differences of healthy fear and anxiety as a mental health concern are:
  - 1. The Legitimacy of the Response
    - a) As I said, there are many legitimate reasons to have a flight or fight response. This is a safety mechanism that God built in us. However, someone who is battling an unhealthy anxiety is usually responding to things which should not evoke a fear response. In many cases, there is not an actual tangible cause for anxiety and panic attacks. Our bodies just respond as if in a life or death situation without a legitimate reason.

2. The Logic of the Response
  - a) People who battle against anxiety often are fearful in illogical ways. If I can continue with the example of having a healthy fear in a near car accident, consider the difference between having a fear response in that situation versus while you are sitting at home. So while the fear of a car accident is legitimate it is not logical that it would occur in your living room.
3. The Length of Response
  - a) The duration and timing of anxiety are also a factors. Say a person has been in a car accident - they have a legitimate concern - and now are in the car on the interstate - they have a logical concern. That state of anxiety should taper off as time goes by. Unhealthy anxiety can result in being in a state of fear for longer times and after longer periods of time than normal.

### III. Demonstration

- A. The Bible is the greatest book ever written. It tells the story of God's redemption of the human race. In that story we see how God meets with, enables, and works through men and women to advance His Kingdom. Believe it or not we see anxiety in the stories of many biblical heroes.
  1. Adam and Eve are certainly anxious as they hide from God in a bush after the Fall.
  2. Moses certainly displayed symptoms of anxiety in the Exodus account.
  3. Gideon demonstrated anxiety when he was sifting wheat in a hole in the ground.
  4. David writes about his sleepless nights, days of weeping, feelings of being forsaken, and fear about the future in the Psalms.
- B. How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken. But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me. (Psalm 13:1 - 6)
- C. On that day, when evening came, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the bloat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him. And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4:35 - 41)
  1. I love the way that Mark writes this story. He uses a subtle literary device to help us feel the chaos of the storm. Notice how Mark starts each sentence with the word "and." Even the way he writes about this storm is done in a frenzied manner. It makes us feel anxious along with the disciples.
  2. Earlier I explained that unhealthy anxiety usually consists of illegitimate and illogical reasons for a fear response. We might be tempted to think that the disciples have a very legitimate and logical reason to be afraid. However, if we look closer we see that is not the case.

3. Their fear was illegitimate and illogical for a few reasons:
  - a) They Doubted Jesus' Word
    - (1) He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." (Mark 4:35)
  - b) They Doubted Jesus' Peace
    - (1) Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him...
  - c) They Doubted Jesus' Love
    - (1) ...and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"
  - d) They Doubted Jesus' Power
    - (1) And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" *They became very much afraid* and said to one another, "*Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?*"
    - (2) Would God allow His children to face fear, uncertainty, hardship, and suffering so that they would have a greater awareness of who He is, how powerful He is, how loving He is, and to make us more useful to His kingdom? You better believe He would.

#### IV. Defense

- A. "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? 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? And who of you being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the Lillies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 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! Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' Or 'What will we drink?' Or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:25 - 34)

##### 1. Our Treasure

- a) Jesus' begins this section with the words, "For this reason." This should cause us to ask "for what reason?" As always, the context is key to understanding this passage.
  - (1) "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19 - 21)
  - (2) "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." (Matthew 6:24)

- b) “Jesus reminded us that life on earth is short and we can’t take anything with us. He taught us that what we value will become what we prioritize. If we value the world’s priorities more than we value God’s priorities, we will naturally be anxious about the things of this world like food, clothing, and “stuff.” Because our money, health, reputation, and relationships are valuable to us, we become anxious when what we love becomes threatened. Anxiety provides us a window into what our hearts find truly valuable. When our hearts align with God’s values, we will view the dangers around us differently. Death, discomfort, and dire circumstances don’t have the same sting when we have God’s eternal perspective. When God’s values and our values align, we will understand what is most important and live out the purpose we were created for.” (Dr. Tim Allchin via <https://biblicalcounselingcenter.org/how-jesus-addressed-fear-worry-and-anxiety/>)
2. Our Trust
- a) Anxiety also exposes where our trust is. Are we trusting in our riches, our comfort, our relationships, ourselves? Or are we trusting in God?
- (1) “And who of you being worried can add a single hour to his life?”
- (2) “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:7 - 11)
3. Our Triumph
- a) If we take all that Jesus teaches here, we find some wisdom from God in how we can deal with anxiety in our lives.
- (1) Treasure heavenly things over earthly ones.
- (2) Trust God to provide for us as He does all of His creation.
- (a) “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ Or ‘What will we drink?’ Or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” (Matthew 6:31 - 32)
- (3) Realize that worry does not help at all.
- (a) “And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?” (Matthew 6:27)
- (4) Seek to advance God’s Kingdom.
- (a) “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33)
- (b) The kingdom is “God’s rule and reign through His people.” Seek, as your highest priority, to be under the Lordship of Christ and to advance His kingdom. Jesus says those who seek God’s kingdom and righteousness first will be taken care of.
- (5) Focus on the present troubles not potential future ones.
- (a) “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:34)

- b)
- 4.
- B. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:6 - 11)
  - 1. Humble yourself before God
    - a) God gives grace to the humble but resists the proud. What does humility look like in this passage? The context makes it clear that humility is tied to trusting God with your concerns. The battle is surrender.
  - 2. God will exalt the humble at the proper time
  - 3. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you
    - a) Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken. (Psalm 55:22)
  - 4. Be on guard against the devil
  - 5. Resist the devil in faith
  - 6. Know that you are not alone in your suffering
  - 7. Trust that God Himself will 'perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.'
- C. Psalm 55:22

## V. Conclusion and Application

- A. How to fight anxiety and panic.
  - 1. Seek the Lord
    - a) Prayer
    - b) Worship
    - c) Preaching
    - d) Fasting
  - 2. Serve the Lord
  - 3. Stay with the Lord's People