

ANXIETY ROUNDTABLE

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INTRODUCTION

The Roundtable began with Chris reading Philippians 4:13-14. "I can do all things through him who strengthened me. Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble." Chris stated this was the focus of our time together: to share in our troubles together.

What has your personal experience been like during this COVID-19 crisis? The panel responded with the answers, "disorienting, disconnection, disruptive, lethargy, having a hard time engaging in the solitude and silence and isolation, emptiness, feeling distance, etc."

- As we shelter at home, identify the one thing that you miss the most about your "pre-COVID-19 life."
- Describe what life has been like for you during this crisis. What aspects have been the most difficult?

Introduction Summary from Our Panel:

There is so little that we can control right now, and this raises anxiety. We thought we had some control over our life and suddenly we realize that we have very little control. The question that we ultimately need to ask is, "I feel out of control but do I believe that God is in control?" Ultimately that lead us to the question, "Where does God fit into this situation?"

- Read Isaiah 41:10 and Psalm 62:5-8
- What are some things we can thank God for in the midst of our solitude, isolation, and fear of the future?

DISCUSSION WITH PANEL

What is the Definition of "Crisis"?

The truth is that the world has been in a crisis since the creation of the world, and will be until Christ returns to set it all right again.

- Read Genesis 3. (Even if this passage is very familiar to you, take the time to read it again.) Identify the reasons why the world has been in a crisis since creation.

We tend to believe that we are in control of our lives. We came into this crisis as broken people and we never really had control over our lives. What makes something a "crisis" is that, "something happens to us [living during Covid-19] and that situation exposes our limited control" and we realize again that we actually



have no ability to ultimately control our lives. The problem is, we have created a world where we think we are in control. We have learned and acquired methods and skills to manage our lives and this has given us the impression that we are in control. These coping skills and systems help us to believe we are in control.

When a crisis occurs, all of the ways we “manage our life” come to a halt and we become lost. For Christ followers, when God doesn’t respond in the way we thought he would, or we need him too, we find ourselves in a crisis and feelings of fear and anxiousness rise up in us. We then begin to question God’s goodness, and everything about him, because he is not responding the way that we want him to. Crisis is all about the lack of control.

- Can you identify some ways you have tried to “manage” your life and therefore believed you were in control of your life?
- Read Job 38:4-18. Identify some characteristics of God.
- Read Isaiah 45:18. Spend a little bit of time thanking the Lord that he is the one ultimately in control of our lives.

How Does This Crisis Impact Us?

We tend to think that the real crisis is externally in the world (COVID-19). But there is also crisis going on internally. The “big” crisis reveals the inner crisis that is going on internally. This exposes the cracks in the way in which we have tried to manage our lives. We feel lost. Our goal becomes, “I want my life to get back to the way that it was—as opposed to taking a look at the cracks that have been exposed in our internal lives that reveal a broken system of the ways we have tried to manage our lives.”

We no longer have tons of people around us, we no longer have the noise of busyness around us that has helped us cover up our brokenness. This forces us to examine ourselves at a deeper level and to identify how we cope with the world when it is no longer working the way it was. A crisis is an opportunity to look inward and to examine the cracks that have been exposed by the crisis. The aloneness, and disruption of life, gives us an opportunity to examine “how I cope with my world around me when I feel out of control.”

- In the context of the current crisis we are experiencing, where would you rate yourself on the anxiety score right now? On a scale of 1 – 10 (with 1 being no anxiety and 10 being full anxiety).



- Our scores can change daily or even hourly. What are some things that contribute to your scale moving lower or higher?
- What cracks and vulnerability—in the way you have tried to manage life in the past—have been exposed to you during this time of feeling out of control?

What is the Definition of Anxiety?

Anxiety tells us that there is an issue going on internally that is being revealed to us. It reveals to us that we are not in control. Clinically, it can be the inability to sleep, eating too much, panic, finding ways to numb our feelings or distract us from what is happening around us. It can also show itself by becoming obsessed with the news, the latest update, or social media information.

Panic is more intense anxiety. Anxiety is the feeling that I am out of control and there is no end date to this. When there is no end in sight to our lack of control, our anxiety tends to increase. This can cause us to cry out to the Lord, "How long?" We are in good company, the prophets and psalmists also cried out too long with they faced struggles.

- Read Psalm 13. What do you observe about the ways David cries out to the Lord?

What About the Spiritual Component of our Anxiety During this Time?

Anxiety is real. There is a balance between trusting in God in the mist of our fear, knowing that he is ultimately in control, vs. being flippant and taking no precautions because we know that God is in control. Anxiety is not wrong in and of itself, but anxiety can develop into a continuous cycle that begins with feeling anxious, then grow into feelings of shame for feeling anxious, which lead us to feel even more anxiety.

- Read Philippians 4:6-7 What do these verses reveal to us about God and our anxiety?

We are anxious because we are human. When our anxiety is heightened, we can see it as God's invitation to prayer. It is an opportunity for us to ask, "Is God calling me to pray? To trust him with the promises that only he can give? The anxiety and worry we are experiencing is an opportunity for us to lean into him a little bit more." Anxiety is a

feeling; it can co-exist with our faith they blend together. We live in a fallen world, crisis will happen.

- Spend some time in prayer. Talk with God about the anxieties that are stirring within you. Ask the Lord to help you choose to trust in the mist of the worry and anxiety.

What Biblical Examples of Anxiety Can You Identify?

Paul said both, “Be anxious for nothing” (Phil. 4:6-7), and also “I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious” (Phil. 2:28).

Paul said “...for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content” (Phil. 4:11), yet also “For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired even of life itself” (2 Cor. 1:8).

Jesus in the Garden experienced anxiety on the night he was betrayed. He said both, “I know you are the Father,” but he also sweated drops of blood from his feelings of sorrow (Matt. 26).

Summary of Discussion:

Crisis is an interruption to life. The end result is to make me a little bit more like Christ. Contentment, is not a destination—until eternity. We will always wrestle with it. There are two ends to a spectrum here. One end is the belief that anxiety is sin and you just need more faith and belief to overcome. The other end is becoming overcome and crushed by anxiety. We need to land in the middle where anxiety can be an opportunity to drive us into deeper dependence and trust in Christ.

APPLICATION

How Do We Begin to Care for Ourselves During This Time?

We need to be honest about our worry and anxiety and accept the fact that this is a normal response to a crisis. Remember that God is not surprised by anything that is going on. Make a choice to make time with God a priority in your life. Be reminded that God desires to work in our hearts and to bring us into a greater dependence on him and a greater trust of him in the midst of our anxiety and worry.



How Can we Begin to Turn Toward Others During this Crisis?

We need community. We also need to join in WITH others in their anxiety. It is essential that we enter into community during this time. We need to extend community to our family, and others in our circle—without judgement—to create a safe place for honesty. We have to be creative and intentional in figuring out how to move toward others during this time.

- What feelings and thoughts have you been hesitant to share with those around you?
- What judgements, roadblocks, or fears can you identify that keep you from being intentional and reaching out to those around you?
- Read Hebrews 10:23-25. What is one thing you can do to move towards others in honesty and non-judgement at this time?
- Identify a way that you can begin to make a conscious effort to move towards God and his Word each day in this midst of this crisis.
- Close your time in prayer with the God who is in control of all things and loves you and knows your deepest fears.