

RESCUE

RESCUE, PART 2: ANXIETY

Anxiety is a meteor shower of what-ifs. It's a low-grade fear. An edginess, a dread. A cold wind that won't stop howling. It's not so much a storm as the certainty that one is coming. Always... coming. Sunny days are just an interlude. You can't relax. Can't let your guard down. All peace is temporary, short-term. There's trouble out there! So you don't sleep well. You don't laugh often. You don't enjoy the sun. You don't whistle as you walk. You're part Chicken Little and part Eeyore. The sky is falling, and it's falling disproportionately on you. Anxiety and fear are cousins but not twins. Fear sees a threat. Anxiety imagines one.

BIG IDEA: Anxiety is a meteor shower of what-ifs that almost never happen.

This week, Pastor Chris and Psychologist Dr. Billy Bowie discusses the number two health problem in the world—anxiety. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, anxiety disorders are reaching epidemic proportions. In a given year nearly 50 million Americans will feel the effects of a panic attack, phobias, or other anxiety disorders. Anxiety disorders in the United States are the number one mental health problem among women and are second only to alcohol and drug abuse among men.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The word anxious defines itself. It is a hybrid of *angst* and *xious*. *Angst* is a sense of unease. *Xious* is the sound I make on the tenth step of a flight of stairs when my heart beats fast and I run low on oxygen. I can be heard inhaling and exhaling, sounding like the second syllable of anxious, which makes me wonder if anxious people aren't just that: people who are out of breath because of the angst of life.

A native Hawaiian once explained the origin of the name that islanders use for non-Hawaiians—*haole*. *Haole* is a Hawaiian word for “no breath.” The name became associated with the European immigrants of the 1820's. “Our forefathers thought the settlers were always in a hurry to build plantations, harbors, and ranches. To the native Hawaiians they seemed short of breath.”

Anxiety takes our breath, for sure. If only that were all it took. It also takes our sleep. Our energy. Our well-being.

1. Have you ever been afraid of heights but found yourself high up? (Rock climbing, roller coaster, etc.?) Describe the experience.
2. What are some areas that cause anxiety in your life? (Job stability, Depleted Savings, Relationships, Major expense)? How do you normally respond to these issues? Is it a productive response that addresses the circumstance, or a paralyzing response?
3. Dr. Bowie defined anxiety as a bodily reaction to a **perceived threat** that 95% of the time, our worst case scenarios never happen, but it still affects our life as it is true. In the past, how have you reacted to fear and anxiety? What has anxiety taken or stole from you? Kept you from trying or experiencing?
4. A life controlled by fear, rather than faith, becomes a self-destructive power. *With your Bible or the Bible App, read Isaiah 41:10.*

Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.
Isaiah 41:10 (NLT)

5. Fear is not just an unpleasant feeling. Fear is a hindrance to everything God has called you to be and to do. Fear can single-handedly keep us from experiencing the fulfillment of promises that God has already made us. According to Isaiah 41:10, what reason does God give NOT to be afraid or discouraged?
6. Discourage comes from the root word “to remove courage from someone.” So God says, “Be courageous!” *With your Bible or the Bible App, read Matthew 14:25-27.*

About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!" But Jesus immediately said to them, "Don't be afraid. Take courage. I am here!" Matthew 14:25-27 (NLT & NIV)

7. What kinds of things do you trust in, especially when life gets stormy, that help you feel comfortable and secure rather than fearful? Be honest!
8. When Jesus shows up, He uses the words 'take courage'. Where is courage supposed to come from?
9. *With your Bible or the Bible App, read 2 Timothy 1:7.* If God doesn't give fear, who do you think does?

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT)

10. *With your Bible or the Bible App, read Habakkuk 3:19 from the Amplified Bible.*

The Lord God is my Strength, my personal bravery, and my invincible army; He makes my feet like hinds' feet and will make me to walk—not to stand still in terror, but to walk—and make spiritual progress upon my high places of trouble, suffering, or responsibility!

Habakkuk 3:19 (Amplified Bible)

11. Where does Habakkuk say our strength, bravery and courage should come from? Where does Habakkuk get his sure-footed confidence?
12. Habakkuk moved from hopelessness to joy over the 3 chapters of this book. In what areas of your life would you like God to take you from hopelessness to joy?

MOVING FORWARD

Some anxiety can be healthy—it is the canary in the coal mine, warning of potential danger. Anxiety and fear are the appropriate reaction to a burning building or growling dog. Anxiety itself is not a sin. But it can lead to sin. When does that happen, and what does it look like in a real person's experience? In what ways have your encounters with fear increased your awe of God?

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

What if you were no longer anxious? What if your life was no longer controlled by anxiety? What if we are more willing to be obedient than we are afraid? What would your family look like? What would your community look like? What would this world look like?

This week, attack the problem of anxiety from two fronts—spiritual and physical. With the spiritual, memorize Habakkuk 3:19 from the Amplified Bible. On the physical side, practice the progressive muscle relaxation techniques that Dr. Billy Bowie taught us.

CHANGING YOUR MIND

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Habakkuk 3:19 (Amplified Bible)