

Blake Gillen
Cornerstone
February 18, 2024

God's Power And Plan For Fear, Anxiety and Worry

Thank you for being here this morning. I hope you had a good week. The title for our lesson this morning is God's power and plan for fear, worry, and anxiety. Remember the goal of this 10 week study called Transformed by Truth is to grow in learning to apply the Word of God to specific issues we all face in the Christian life. The bad news is that we all face regular temptations to fear, anxiety and worry, but the good news is that God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

After we first moved here a few years ago I got asked to speak to our ladies at a refresh event on a Thursday morning on the topic of anxiety. I wasn't really sure what a refresh event meant. **All I knew is where they met and what time and that I would probably be the only guy in the room.** I'm used to being the only man in the room in my home (I have a wife and 3 daughters so that makes me the man of the house), but not in the church. Thankfully, Ron Rothrock was there to help me with the sound.

I remember walking into the room upstairs where our children's church is now and there were close to 100 ladies sitting around tables talking to one another. I walked in and my first thought was to leave. Head out to my truck and drive back to Kansas or maybe Texas or another far off country like Siberia. **I felt anxious teaching lots of ladies I didn't know on anxiety.**

We all have various areas of our lives where we feel such things. What I experienced that morning doesn't come close to what the apostle Paul experienced doing the work of the ministry. As an apostle to the Gentiles, the apostle Paul was constantly going wherever the Holy Spirit led him to proclaim

the gospel of Christ. **He went where the Spirit led him even though he knew that he would suffer.** He's honest about his feelings along the way.

Please look with me at 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. Corinth, we know, was a notoriously wicked city. Lots of people who were expert sinners. Paul was basically walking into a sea of spiritual darkness when he went to Corinth to preach the light of the world and he is honest about what he felt when he went there.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

- 2:1 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.
- 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.
- 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,
- 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,
- 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Do you see the emotions Paul felt that he describes in verse 3 when he went to Corinth to preach Christ crucified? There are a lot of things I love about Paul. I kind of want to be like him when I grow up. **One thing I love about Paul is that he is honest in his letters about his feelings, but he never allowed his negative feelings and emotions to keep him from doing God's will. His honesty gives us hope.** Paul felt fear and yet he stayed faithful.

Let's consider a description of fear, worry and anxiety. Brian Borgman writes, "Fear is the emotion of serious distress, which is aroused by impending danger, evil, or pain, whether real or imagined. Fear makes us feel helpless. Fear hauntingly reminds us we are not in control, and there is nothing we can do about it. Worry and fear are emotions that overlap. To worry is to feel uneasy or anxious about something. There are troubling thoughts associated with worry.

Anxiety looks like worry amped up a few volts. There is mental and emotional distress. There is uneasiness of mind caused by uncertainty."

I agree with a biblical counselor named Jim Newheiser who wrote, "Worry, stress, and fear are closely related and often dealt with sinfully." What are some sinful ways Christians deal with worry, stress and fear? One way is gluttony. We seek to find comfort in food for our troubled souls. Another way may be talking more to people about whatever is tempting us in these areas verses studying the Scriptures to grow in the knowledge of God and praying through the problems.

What is really dangerous about this is that some people who appear to be Christ followers walk away from the Lord when they don't handle the cares of the world the right way. Look at it with me in Mark 4:13-20:

Mark 4:13-20

- 13 And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"
- 14 The sower sows the word.
- 15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.
- 16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.
- 17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.
- 18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word,
- 19 **but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.**

20 But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

Look at verse 19. This is a description of the thorny heart. A heart in which the seed of the word appears to be working for a season, but things enter in and choke the word and it proves unfruitful. These are not people who were saved and then lost their salvation. A genuine believer cannot lose their salvation (Romans 8:28-30). These are people who look saved, but over time something is happening in their hearts that takes control.

What chokes the word out of these people's hearts are the cares of the world. **The greek word translated cares means to be apprehensive, to have anxiety, to be unduly concerned.** They allow worries to choke the word and it proves unfruitful. That's a sobering thought, isn't it? These are people who appeared to be saved, but they allowed anxieties from the world to take the place of God's Word in their heart and they lose their focus on Christ in the midst of their cares. I can talk more with you if you disagree with my interoperation of the thorny heart and how the cares of the world choke out the word.

The Moody Bible Commentary, “A third response occurred as seed was sown among the thorns. *There was a response, but thorns choked out the truth and no fruit developed.* Thorns that arise include the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things.”

I hope you sense so far in this lesson that what we are talking about is a really big deal. How a person responds to the inevitable feelings of fear, anxiety is a really big deal. Who has cares that come from living in a broken world? Everyone who has a mirror and looks into it. The point is that someone who is born again has cares and learns what to do with them.

The issue is not perfection. Praise God Jesus is our righteousness! The issue is Spirit empowered direction. Letting the Holy Spirit lead us in righteousness by applying His truth to the problems that God sends our way to make us more like

Christ. I'm not saying the Bible teaches that a believer never struggles with the cares of the world. I am saying a believer learns to look to Christ and His sufficiency in the midst of dealing with the cares of the world.

This morning I want to do something a little different. I want to talk about a plan for helping another professing believer who comes to you and opens up about fear, worry and anxiety being a daily struggle. After telling them, "Welcome to the club" I would consider spending a month with them taking them through the following Scriptures.

Where to begin? Begin with the one thing we should fear - God's wrath and how God's love saved us from God's future judgment.

1. Help Them Consider How Perfect Love Casts Out Fear - 1 John 4:18

Look with me in your Bible at 1 John 4:18. Why would I start here? Have any of you ever set up dominoes and then pushed over the first domino and all the other ones fall over? 1 John 4:18 is kind of like a lead domino. Once this one falls, it puts everything in perspective.

Remember John wrote his gospel primarily for evangelism. John 20:30-31, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." That's the primary purpose of the gospel of John. 1 John has a different stated purpose. 1 John 5:13, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life."

John wrote his letter to help Christians with assurance of salvation. In 1 John 4:7-21 John walks these believers back through the love of God. Toward the end of this refresher course on the love of God he writes in verse 18, "There is no

fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love." John connects God's love with fear in this verse 4 times.

He begins with an affirmation - There is no fear in love. The word fear actually leads off the sentence. It literally reads, "Fear not is in love." John uses the Greek word Phobos which can mean either a good fear (respect) or a bad fear (dread). **In the context John is referring to the bad fear - dread of God's future judgment.** His point is that God's perfect love displayed in the work of Christ casts out fear of God's future judgment. What Jesus did on the cross in the past saves us from the outpouring of God's wrath on us in the future. John's claim here is that love and fear are mutually exclusive. They cannot exist because one drives out the other - Perfect love casts out fear.

Why would I start here if I was helping someone who genuinely professes faith in Christ with addressing fear, anxiety and worry? **Because the one thing we should fear has been cast out.** We are sinners. God is holy. He has every right to judge us for our sins and cast us into hell. If we should fear anything in this life, it is God's wrath. But John reminds us in 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 that God's wrath was removed at the cross.

1 John 2:2, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

1 John 4:10, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Propitiation is the removal of wrath. This is why Jesus came. He came to die for our sins to absorb God's wrath toward all our sins. He drank the cup of God the Father's wrath for us so there is none left over for us to drink. Come on people. This is amazing love.

That would be one week. Have them look away from whatever is tempting them to FAW (Fear, anxiety and worry) and have them spend more time thinking about the love of God for them primarily displayed at the cross. **A heavy dose of thinking hard about God's love - What it is and what it does with the fear of future judgment.** We have considered in this class that the cross is one event with many applications. Here we learn that God's past love shown at the cross casts out all fear of God's future judgment. Praise the Lord there is no more wrath left over for us because Jesus drank the cup of God's judgment all the way down in our place. **That puts everything in perspective.**

The second week I may ask this question. **If 1 John 4:18 shows us what love does to the wrong kind of fear, how do we cultivate the right kind of fear? There is a fear that is bad in the Bible, but there is also a fear that is good.** Remember words have meaning in Scripture depending on their context. There a fear of God that flows from salvation that's a good thing.

The second week I may take the person struggling with fear, worry and anxiety through 1 Peter 1:17-21 helping them connect Godly fear with salvation.

2. Help them have the right fear of God based on salvation - 1 Peter 1:17-21

Please turn in your Bible to 1 Peter 1:17. **Do you guys remember when it was a good thing to be known as a God fearing person?** When we first moved to Kansas in 2011 from Kentucky our next door neighbor stopped by to meet us. He knocked on our front door, and I answered the door. He introduced himself and began to tell me what everybody else did in the neighborhood. There weren't too many houses in our neighborhood and he knew everyone by name and what they did for a living. He was kind of like the mayor of the neighborhood.

Then he asked me what I did for a living. I told him I was a body builder (I serve Christ in the building of His body, the church). No. I told him I was a pastor. He got a funny look on his face and then he said, "Well that's good. We need more God-fearing people in this neighborhood." He didn't claim to be one himself, but it was just nice to have one next-door.

There was a day not so long ago when people who didn't fear God were happy for people who did fear God. Now that mentality has changed. We live in an increasingly hostile culture to anyone who calls themselves a Christian and lives it out in their daily life. This is what Peter's audience was experiencing. They were experiencing hostility from a culture that hated them for loving Christ. They used to go with the flow of the world around them into sin, but now they go against the world around them in righteousness.

Their temptation was to fear man more than God because many of them were being arrested by the Roman government and killed for their loyalty to Christ. Peter knew what it was to fail in the fear of man department. Remember the night before the cross He denied the Lord three times to a servant girl. He failed, but Jesus pursued Peter and forgave Him. Peter aged well as a saint and he has a lot to teach us in 1 Peter about fearing God and not fearing man.

I remember John MacArthur giving some good advice one day. I think he's probably done it more than just one day. He said if you want to grow in knowing God better pick a book of the Bible, a shorter one, and read it through once a day for a month. It would probably take 20 minutes or so to read through 5 chapters in 1 Peter. If I was meeting with someone struggling with the wrong kind of fear and I was trying to help them with the right kind of fear, I would probably encourage them to read through 1 Peter once a day for a week after going through 1 Peter 1:17-21 with them.

1 Peter 1:17-21

- 17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, **conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,**
- 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,
- 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.
- 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you
- 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Peter is helping born again people have the right attitude toward the Lord. Reverence. It's always helpful whenever you are meeting with someone and studying Scripture together to make sure you understand the context and the flow of the letter. This is why getting a reliable study Bible can help you with the author and the audience and the flow of the letter.

2 main themes emerge in this letter up to verse 16. **Hope and holiness.** Peter helps Christians connect the hope we have in Christ to the holiness God demands from His people. Live in hope and live in holiness. Then in verses 17-21 he tells us to live in fear. This is the right kind of fear that connects back to the cross.

How should believers conduct themselves between here and heaven? The end of verse 17 shows us how - "Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile." **Peter is describing our attitude to God the Father on days that end with y - every day.** How we live before God on a daily basis. The direction of our lives. This is a clarion call to urgent reverent living. D. Edmond Hiebert, "The aorist imperative comprehends the remainder of the Christian life under that command."

One motivation for holiness is that one day each of us will stand before God and give an account for how we used our Christian life - That's verse 17. Another motivation for living in constant fear of the Lord, the good kind of fear, is what God paid to buy us back from our former life of sin. **In verses 18-21 Peter reminds us that God did not buy us back from our sins with silver or gold.** He paid a much greater price. He bought us back with the precious blood of His eternal Son, the One He knew and loved before He made the world.

We need to help people connect their redemption with reverence.

No higher price could be paid for our redemption, Amen. In the Bible fearing God is closely connected to receiving forgiveness from God. Psalm 130:3-4, "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared." The way God forgives our sin leads to us taking Him seriously.

A book I recommend on this is called *The Joy of Fearing God* by Jerry Bridges. So, in addition to giving 1 Peter homework for a week - reading it through for a week after talking about 1 Peter 1:17-21, I would encourage them to read through *The Joy of Fearing God* slowly with a cup of coffee because that's what born again people do - drink coffee and read Jerry Bridges. Just sayin.

The first two weeks I would use 1 John 4 and 1 Peter 1 to help them redirect their fears to the right place. Then I would spend the 3rd week on worry. Remember **worry and fear are emotions that overlap. To worry is to feel uneasy or anxious about something. There are troubling thoughts associated with worry.**

Week 1 - Refocus their mind on perfect love that casts out fear

Week 2 - Remind them that they are to fear the Lord for the right reasons

Week 3 - Help them with Jesus' standard for worry

3. Help them with Jesus' standard for dealing with anxiety - Matthew 6:25-34

Matthew 6:25-34 is a go to section in the sermon on the mount where Jesus puts worry in his crosshairs. His primary concern is helping Christ followers not being anxious over the basic necessities of life. There were no 401k retirement plans back in Jesus' day. Medicare was not made available. People lived day to day.

Matthew 6:25-34

- 25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, 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: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?
- 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?
- 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,
- 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed! like one of these.
- 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?
- 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’
- 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.
- 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
- 34 “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

The Bible says in Proverbs 12:25, "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad." What is our Lord doing in this section? He is helping people whose hearts are weighed down over the basic things needed for survival. Eating and drinking and clothing for daily life and where it comes from. How does Jesus help them? **Jesus raises the standard throughout his section when it comes to anxiety.** He commands us not to be anxious in verse 25 and then he asks why we are anxious in verse 28 and then tells them again in verse 31 not to be anxious.

We need to remember that faith in and love for Christ leads to obedience. Paul tells us in Philippians 4:6 to be anxious for nothing. That's a high standard. **We can't let people get off with the excuse that everybody worries.** They're not everybody - They're a child of the King. Raise their standard when it comes to these anxious thoughts about the daily things of life.

I may read through this section with a friend and ask them questions like - what does worrying add to our lives? What does worrying take away from our lives? Why do we worry? It seems to me in this section that worry is the result of not trusting God. Jesus addresses their little faith at the end of verse 30. Then you may zoom in on verse 33 which is the replacement for worry, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Instead of worrying our full concentration should be on seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Stop worrying. Start trusting. Get to work. The Moody Bible Commentary says, "To **seek first His kingdom** involves not only being prepared for its future coming but also incarnating its values and glorifying its King in the present time. **His righteousness** surely includes what He demands of His children ethically. **All these things** include the basic essentials of life. There is no guarantee that God provides luxury items when people claim them or visualize their reception. The main point of 6:33 is that God so demands His people's undivided attention that He promises to provide their necessities so that they will not worry about them and can fully concentrate on Him."

I would ask them to look back on their life and trace the goodness of God. How He has always been there and provided what they need. His track record of faithfulness.

I would also consider reminding them that worry is a form of pride. Worry comes from trusting in yourself and not trusting in God. God doesn't want us to trust in ourselves. Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." Feeling anxiety or worry over the circumstances of life are God's invitation to grow in trusting Him!

Week 1 - Consider how perfect love casts out fear

Week 2 - Conduct your life in godly fear

Week 3 - Contemplate the care of God the Father

4. Cast all your anxieties on the Lord - 1 Peter 5:6-7

For the 4th meeting I would take them back to 1 Peter, This time chapter 5. If they took me up on reading 1 Peter all the way through for a week, they are familiar with these verses. I would read these two verses and remind them - **Every time we encounter something that tempts us to fret, fume and worry, we have two options - we can help ourselves or humble ourselves.** We can take matters into our own hands or trust the one who holds the waters in the palms of His hands (Isaiah 40:12). The world tells us that no matter what we face in this life we have the power within ourselves to handle anything that comes our way. We the man. We got this.

Notice what Peter tells the saints to do in 1 Peter 5:6-7.

1 Peter 5:6-7

- 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,
- 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

What does Peter tell these people to do? Help yourselves. Figure it out. You got this. You da man. No. He tells them to humble yourselves. One study Bible says, **"In their suffering, God's people are to give themselves entirely to him, submitting to his wise ordering of their lives."**

What does it mean to humble yourself? In their situation it meant accepting the fact that following Christ is hard and they can't look to the world for security or comfort. The world hates Christ and those who follow Him. Humility means accepting that reality that until Jesus returns life will be hard for following Christ and we cannot look to changes in the world for comfort.

To humble ourselves means we confess our constant need for God's help. Dan Doriani, "The command "Humble yourselves" signifies that we don't wait for God, an adversary, or the hardships of life to humble us. We must act on ourselves. Peter doesn't specify *how* we humble ourselves, but the phrase "under God's mighty hand" supplies a hint. The phrase "mighty hand" is common in Exodus, where God's power delivered Israel from slavery and oppression in Egypt. God's mighty hand defeated Pharaoh and humbled him, although he did not humble himself (Ex. 6:1; 13:3–16; Deut. 3:24; 4:34)."

Think of the people of God in Egypt and how they were burdened and how they cried out to God and He delivered them. Think of their 70 year field trip to Babylon and how God delivered them. Think of our sin and how we couldn't free ourselves from sins mastery and we called on Christ and God delivered us (1 Peter 2:24-25). God always delivers His people - He just does it in His timing.

1 Peter 5:7 shows us what humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God looks like in daily life, “casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” How do we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God until Christ returns? **By casting all of our anxieties on Him.** How many anxieties? By casting all. The way to obey verse 6 is to apply verse 7.

Tom Schreiner helpfully reminds us, “Peter wrote this to a church afflicted by suffering and distress, and hence he realized that they faced anxiety. Casting one’s worries on God would not bring comfort if he were unable to afford assistance in times of distress. Nor would anyone tell his worries to those who are cruel or apathetic, for those who are hateful and indifferent mock our worries by their lack of concern. Giving our anxiety to God makes eminent sense “because he cares for you.” God is not indifferent, nor is He cruel. He has compassion on his children and will sustain them in every distress.”

Can I slow down for a second - when was the last time you did this? When was the last time you went through something that led you to FAW feelings and you remembered that God’s hand is mighty and He cares for you personally and your cares are His concerns? God sustains His children who don’t bottle everything up, but bring everything to Him. Psalm 62:8, “Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.”

I remember when our girls were little we got them shoes with Velcro straps to make it easier for them to put on all by themselves. At times I would still offer to help them get their shoes on. What do you think they said back to me? No, Daddy, I do it all by myself. No, Daddy I do it all by myself. Then they would put on their shoes and even though they always had a 50% chance to get them on the right feet they hardly ever did. They almost always put their shoes on the wrong feet and no matter how often I tried to help they resisted my offer. What they couldn't do on their own I could help them with, no problem.

This doesn't mean that people who have real life problems only cast them on the Lord and don't get help from the church. Earlier in 1 Peter 5 Paul reminded us about the role of elders in the church to provide oversight. I think if you have major anxiety issues you should make that known to the elders and ask for help. They may be able to meet with you or they may ask another seasoned saint to meet with you, but get the help you need from the church first and don't go outside the church.

If anything comes out of this lesson this morning, at the very least, I want you to be encouraged that God's Word has the answers to our emotions. Fear, anxiety and worry are emotions that God knows we have and addresses in His Word. If you own a mirror you will look into the reflection of someone who has these things and God knows that and He gives you what you need to glorify Him when you feel that way.

I'll close with a story from John Piper when he felt these things. John Piper tells a true story about being accepted to a doctoral program at a seminary in Munich, Germany. **The only problem is that he grew up in there south where most people barely speak one language much less two.** I can say that because of where I grew up. He was scared about being able to learn the language and get through the program.

As he was getting ready to leave the States for Germany his dad, who was a traveling Evangelist, came up to him and handed him a card with Isaiah 41:10 written out on it, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." John said that he kept that card and read it hundreds of times when he felt afraid. He addressed his feelings with faith that comes from truth and God strengthened him and got him through that tough time.

May we all never forget the power of our great God and may we apply His plan for fear, worry and anxiety so we grow and God is glorified.

