

# Anxiety vs. Peace

Midweek Study 10/9/19

Defining Anxiety:

Webster's Dictionary – “apprehensive uneasiness or nervousness usually over an impending or anticipated ill : a state of being **anxious**.”

American Psychological Association – “Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure.”

**John 14:15-27** - <sup>15</sup> “If you love Me, <sup>[d]</sup>keep My commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another <sup>[e]</sup>Helper, that He may abide with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

<sup>19</sup> “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. <sup>20</sup> At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup> He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and <sup>[f]</sup>manifest Myself to him.”

<sup>22</sup> Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, “Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?”

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. <sup>24</sup> He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

<sup>25</sup> “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. <sup>26</sup> But the <sup>[g]</sup>Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. <sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

I've found historically, people of faith have tended to deal with complex emotions like anxiety in fairly simplistic and one dimensional ways. I don't think this approach has been helpful at all for those who suffer from anxiety either occasionally or chronically. As Pastor Lance taught when we began this series, God created us spirit, soul, and body (Show Slide), so I'm going to talk about how we can address anxiety in each of these areas of our humanity. I believe that a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted approach to anxiety is necessary for us as believers to walk and live in the peace of God. I would also add that each of these areas we are going to look at involves an ongoing, individual, daily walk with Jesus, not just a one-time and one-size-fits-all approach for everyone

**Addressing Anxiety at the Spirit level** – As we have repeated throughout this series, “Every emotion is an invitation by God into deeper intimacy with Him.” When we experience anxiety, we have an open invitation from Jesus to allow His peace to fill our hearts and minds. As we saw in the passage in John that we read, Jesus address the fear and anxiety his disciples had. Some context to this passage in John – in chapter 13, Jesus had just announced Judas' betrayal of him and that he would soon be leaving them. We can reasonably deduce that this information

caused the disciples some distress and anxiety, because immediately following this disclosure, Jesus goes on to speak the words we just read from John 14. Jesus' promise to them and to us is that he would send the Holy Spirit to indwell them and to remind them of all he had taught them.

So what are some ways we can address anxiety at the spirit level?

**1. Acknowledge and invite the presence of God in the midst of your anxiety – vs. 25-27a -** <sup>25</sup> “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. <sup>26</sup> But the [g]Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. <sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.

For those of us who are believers in and follower of Christ, the Word of God says that the Holy Spirit lives and dwells within us. **Isaiah 9:6 - For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

Jesus said he would give us His peace. He is the Prince of Peace, which means wherever He is, wherever his Kingdom is present, wherever his dominion is present, he brings peace. When we invite and acknowledge the presence of the Prince of Peace in the midst of our anxiety, the atmosphere changes!

**2. Surrender your anxiety to God – 1 Peter 5:7 -** <sup>7</sup> Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. This SOUNDS easy. It often isn't. It is an ongoing, and often repetitive process of surrender. I've found this to be a daily, hourly and often “minutely” process of surrender. It is refusing to shoulder the weight of our anxiety every time we notice that we are. Jesus said in **Mathew 11:28 -** <sup>28</sup> “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Jesus offers us a wonderful exchange! We can surrender our heavy load for his burden that is easy and light. In this process, he gives us rest for our souls.

**Addressing Anxiety at the Soul Level –** If you recall from Lance's teaching a couple weeks ago, our souls are made up of three parts, mind, will and emotions. If you remember, as a result of the fall, rather than our minds being submitted to our spirit that is in fellowship with God and our will and emotions following that submitted mind, everything got flipped. As a result, our natural default at the soul level is to be driven by our emotions with our will and mind following behind. The remedy for anxiety at the soul level is to allow God to help us flip this back into right alignment. As we've chosen to invite God's presence into the midst of our anxiety and surrender it to Him, now our soul must choose to follow and respond to this choice.

**1. Focus our Minds on God's truth rather than what our anxiety is telling us. (Mind) vs. 27b -** Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

The fact that Jesus tells his disciples not to let their hearts be trouble or afraid, means they and we have some control over that. We can either choose to meditate on our anxious thoughts which causes our anxiety to grow, or we can choose to meditate on the truth of God's Word and allow it to renew our mind. Romans 12:2 tells us to **“be transformed by the renewing of our minds.”** As we choose to fix our minds on the truth of God, it brings transformation not just to our minds,

but to ALL of who we are. **I can't emphasize this enough – God's Word is our greatest weapon against anxiety!** Again, like surrendering our anxiety to God, focusing our minds on His truth rather than our anxiety is a day-by-day, hour by hour and minute by minute process. This is especially true when we are dealing with a particularly anxious situation. Having some go-to verses of Scripture that address your anxiety either generally, or even better, specifically can really help. Write the verses on note cards, but them on your bathroom mirror or the dashboard of your car. Put them as notes in your phone.

**2. Choose to make decisions in line with the truth of God's Word rather than in response to our anxiety (Will)–** The default of our fallen nature is to let our emotions lead, and make decisions based on how we feel. God calls us to live differently than this. One of the biggest decisions we can make when we are anxious is to pray. **Before we run around and reorder our lives, spend money, use substances and try to “Do” our way out of anxiety, first, foremost and continuously, we need to pray.**

**Philippians 4:6 - <sup>6</sup> Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; <sup>7</sup> and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**

What does say we should be anxious for? Nothing. In what situations does it say we should pray? In everything. I love the promise of God in this verse! It says God's peace that goes beyond what we can understand, that goes beyond what we can grasp or reason about, that goes beyond our current situation, will guard our hearts and guard our minds. When we stop and pray first, before responding to our emotions (and I believe this principle applies to all our emotions) we make room for God's peace to take over. Then the decisions we make will be made by hearts and minds that are guarded by God's peace. It moves of from a place of reacting to a place of responding.

**3. Find healthy ways of bringing our emotions in line with our mind and our will – (Emotions)**

**A. Share your struggles with anxiety with a few close friends - Galatians 6:2 -**

**<sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**

One of the greatest threats to our walk with and life in Christ is isolation. God never intended us to live our lives as Christ-followers alone. When we open up and share our struggles with others, they come alongside us and actually help us carry the load. (Illust. Trying to carry or move something heavy) Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 - **Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor.<sup>10</sup> For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up.<sup>11</sup> Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone?<sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.**

Sharing our lives and our struggles with anxiety (or any struggle really) with a few trusted companions makes all the difference in the world! What is unbearable alone, can be carried together. “Shared sorrow is half sorrow, shared joy is double joy.” – Swedish Proverb

**B. Consider seeing a counselor or therapist to help you deal with the emotional aspects of your anxiety – Proverbs 11:14 - Where there is no counsel, the people fall;**

**But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.**

Sadly, there is so much stigma around seeing a counselor or therapist, and there shouldn't be. Nobody feels ashamed or stigmatized for going to the ER when they break an arm or a

leg. Nobody feels ashamed about going to the doctor when they're sick. And yet when we are sick in our soul, we somehow feel like we should be ashamed. This is WRONG! Seeing a counselor or a therapist when we are struggling with something should be just as normal and just as acceptable as going to a doctor. Shame is one of the biggest lies of Satan that keeps us struggling rather than walking in victory. Professional Counselors and Therapists are trained to know how to listen and how to ask the right questions to help us.

**C. Find times of Sabbath that will restore your soul – Exodus 20:8 - <sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work:**

I believe there's a reason why God made the commandment (notice I didn't say suggestion) of the Sabbath in the “Big 10.” The purpose of Sabbath is to pause, to stop to be refreshed and renewed. The Jewish teachers of the law of course made the Sabbath into a whole completely unrestful series of rules and regulations that nobody was really able to keep, but this was not God's intent. Jesus is recorded as saying in all 3 Synoptic Gospels (Mathew, Mark and Luke) “The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.” In other words, God didn't give the Sabbath commandment to give us another rule to follow, but he gave us the Sabbath commandment for our benefit. When we take time to stop, rest and delight in God, it helps alleviate our anxiety and gives us rest for our soul.

**Addressing Anxiety at the Body or physical level –** We may fully and completely address and deal with anxiety on the spirit and soul levels, and still find ourselves dealing with the PHYSICAL effects of anxiety. Part of dealing with anxiety is dealing with its physical effects. This has to do with our limbic system. That is the part of our body that floods us with adrenalin and other stress hormones. The amygdala is made up of two almond shaped nerve clusters deep in our brains that have to do with memory and our “fight, flight or freeze” response. Our brains are really a remarkable creation of God! They are designed help us function and to keep us safe. The role of the amygdala and the rest of the limbic system is to give us the ability to quickly respond to danger or threat. When a real threat comes against us, our limbic system is designed to help us survive. (Illust. Near car accident) Because our bodies were also broken as a result of the fall, this system doesn't always work exactly as it should. Sometimes something our limbic system gets “stuck on” and continues to flood us with stress hormones even when there is no danger. Other times, our brain perceives something as dangerous and begins to pump out those stress hormones even if we aren't REALLY in danger. This is where I continue to do battle and where about 90% of my current struggle with anxiety is. I want to share a few strategies I've found for dealing with the physical aspects of anxiety. There are not really many Bible verses for these principles just like there aren't any verses about how to set a broken bone or how to do open heart surgery, but some common sense and medical research can help us. **1 Corinthians 6:19-20 <sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? <sup>20</sup> For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body [g]and in your spirit, which are God's.** Paul is talking specifically in these verses about avoiding sexual immorality and thus glorifying God with our bodies, but I believe the greater principle carries through to other areas. God has given us these bodies and expects us to steward them wisely. They don't belong to us, they belong to God!

**A. Consider Diet and Exercise –** I know, nobody likes to talk about or address this,

especially in church, but what we do and what we consume has a dramatic effect on how we feel. Studies have shown that regular aerobic exercise for 20-30 minutes a day is almost identical in its effectiveness as medication in dealing with depression. When we are feeling anxious, we tend to over indulge in the very things that make us more anxious. Too much caffeine, alcohol, or unhealthy foods can cause anxiety to increase. Seeking to eat a healthy diet with regular exercise has the opposite effect.

**B. Consider seeing a Physician to treat the physical symptoms of your anxiety** – Sometimes medication is helpful and necessary to help deal with anxiety. Let me say this loud and clear – **There is NOTHING wrong with and it is NOT sinful to take medication for anxiety, depression or any other issue effecting your body!** I counseled with a man a few years ago who told me he had been told by a Pastor that it was a sin to take medication for his depression after his wife had died. This is WRONG! Ultimately, God is the one who heals our bodies, and sometimes he uses doctors and medication to do it. Medication can help bring into balance brain chemistry that has gotten out of balance. The only problem with taking medication, is thinking that it alone will deal with every aspect of our anxiety. It won't, but it will help us deal with the PHYSICAL aspects.

**C. Make sure you are getting enough sleep/rest** – To some degree, this overlaps somewhat with what I already said about Sabbath. Sabbath gives us rest for our souls, but it also gives us rest for our bodies. Rested bodies are healthier and more able to withstand the stresses of everyday life. Most people in our culture are sleep deprived. Studies have shown the ideal amount of sleep, while varying somewhat from person to person, is between 7 and 9 hours of sleep per night. Remember, it is during our sleep that our brains process things and reset. When we don't get enough sleep, we don't give our brains enough time to recover which can add to our anxiety.

I will close tonight with the verses we began our emotions series with - **1 Thessalonians 5:23-24** -

<sup>23</sup> **Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify<sup>[g]</sup> you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.** <sup>24</sup> **He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.**