

Anxiety

Today we are **Week 3** of our series called “**Sound Mind**” where we have been diving into the topic of mental health and attempting to address some of the major struggles we have regarding our mental health. Our theme verse for this series is **2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV) For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.** It is because of this incredible promise that we can have the HOPE of VICTORY regarding whatever we may be facing physically, emotionally or spiritually.

We have 3 main Goals we hope to accomplish throughout the 5 weeks of this series.

- **Goal #1** is to help you understand you are not alone! The mental health issue is a human issue! We all struggle in some way with our mental health!
- **Goal #2** is to help you see that therapy (seeking the help of a mental health professional) is not a sign of spiritual weakness but is actually a step of courage. Sharing your burden with others who are equipped to help you is a blessing God has given us. Sometimes we need help sorting through and working on things that have us bound up emotionally.
- **Goal #3** is to help you see Jesus is the answer for whatever your struggle may be! Jesus wants to heal you, comfort you, and give you victory over whatever is coming against your life.

Today, we are going to deal with the issue of **ANXIETY.** (Let’s **PRAY** before we jump in)

[\(First Half of Hillary testimony video\)](#)

According to the Cleveland Clinic in 2022, “[Mental \(behavioral\) health disorders, or mental illnesses, affect the way you think and behave. They change your mood and can make it difficult to function at home, work, school or in your community.](#)” And the form of mental health disorder we are discussing today is anxiety disorder.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of fear, dread, and uneasiness. Occasional anxiety is a part of life. You might feel anxious when faced with a problem at work, before taking a test, or before making an important decision.

In reality, God gave our brains the ability to sense danger in order to respond accordingly. For example, if you are looking to cross the street and you see a truck approaching at 50 mph, then your brain is going to signal there is a threat ahead if you move forward, so don’t move forward yet. The main part of our brain that processes emotions is the **amygdala**. The amygdala participates in the decision-making, and the instinctive and motivational behaviors; and activates the fight-or-flight response.

Now for anxiety disorders, they involve more than temporary worry or fear. For a person with an anxiety disorder, the anxiety does not go away and can get worse over time. The symptoms can interfere with daily activities like job performance, schoolwork, and even relationships with others. Sometimes the symptom could even cause some to hyper focus on something (due to fear) to the expense of other areas of your life. There are various types of anxiety disorders like Generalized Anxiety, Panic Disorder, Specific Phobias, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, PTSD, and Social Anxiety. It is important for us to point out that having an anxiety disorder is not considered to be sinful in and of itself.

Pastor Tres Adames says this, “Theologically, for something to be a sin, it must spring from one’s own free will. People with anxiety disorders don’t have the ability to choose to not have it (without treatment). Infirmities are not sins and equating them with sin only adds more shame and thus contributes to the problem rather than offering hope.”

Some people are even currently living with their anxiety disorders untreated or unaddressed due to many factors. According to the ADAA (Anxiety & Depression Association of America), anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults ages 18 and older (19.1% of the population). They even say that only 36.9% of those who suffer with anxiety disorders get treated, despite the fact that anxiety disorders are highly treatable. By the way, when we use the term “mental illness” I don’t want you to think of that in a demeaning way or take that as an insult or some type of slur towards one who is struggling mentally and emotionally. It is simply a term we are using to describe that an individual is not well, just like if someone had the Flu.

Also, in combination with last week’s sermon on depression... The National Alliance of Mental Illness says, “Some estimates show that 60% of those with anxiety will also have symptoms of depression, and the numbers are similar for those with depression also experiencing anxiety.” Maybe the source of your depression is the undealt with anxiety you wrestle with.

But I need you to hear this statement again: **Anxiety disorders are treatable!** You can overcome it. You’ll never be able to get rid of the ability to feel (which includes feelings of fear, uneasiness, worry, etc), because God made you to be able to feel and think. **BUT, you can overcome anxiety from hindering your life, and instead learn to process through your emotions and thoughts in healthy ways, and in result, be able to better live the life God has created you to live.**

So with that information being shared, I want us to discuss 5 principles that we see in God’s Word when addressing the issue of anxiety.

Principle #1 - Seek counsel

Trying to do things on our own is not wise. God’s word tells us that we need to seek out counsel and that we need guidance in our lives. Let’s look at 2 verses in Proverbs that speak on this:

Proverbs 15:22 (NIV) “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”

Proverbs 24:6 (NIV) “Surely you need guidance to wage war, and victory is won through many advisers.”

Often we think we can do things on our own, when in reality we were never made to be lone rangers in life; and to think we can do it on our own is pride. According to Proverbs, if we have counsel and guidance, then we will find success in life. Success mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. I am not speaking of some false prosperity lifestyle the world tempts us with, but rather the fullness of life God offers us through His wonderful grace and love.

When speaking about counsel and guidance, I would strongly encourage finding counsel from good godly friends, a faithful pastor, and a good therapist (especially a therapist who is a Christian). God created us for community. Having as many people in our corner to help us will benefit us greatly, which will in turn help us be in a better place to follow God and help others. [You may need a therapist to help you discern whether you have an anxiety disorder or not, and if so, what kind of disorder it may be.](#)

Pastors, therapists, friends, and family are a blessing from God. They are a grace gift from God to help us through the challenges of life.

James 1:17 (NIV) “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

And on top of that, we need to seek counsel from God too. **Isaiah 28:29 (NIV)** “This also comes from the Lord of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.” God is the wisest and greatest of all counselors and He loves us more than we can imagine. So it is extremely important to seek the Lord in prayer, reading scripture, fasting, and walking in obedience. Besides, God wants nothing more than for us to bring our anxieties and issues to Him.

Psalms 55:22 (NIV) “Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.”

1 Peter 5:7 (NIV) “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

Principle #1 - Seek Counsel!

Principle #2 - Keep your eyes on the Lord

Not only do we need to seek out God’s counsel, but we need to keep our eyes on Him, His Kingdom, and His righteousness.

Matthew 6:31-34 (NIV) “31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

When we lose sight of God and His goodness, we can easily lose sight of life and start sinking. One example of this is with Martha and Mary. Jesus was in the house but Martha still found things to worry about which led her to being overwhelmed and miss the most important thing in the moment (the Lord).

Another example of losing sight of God is when Jesus was walking on water and Peter stepped out to walk on the water with Jesus, which is mentioned in **Matthew 14:27-31**, “27 But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” 28 “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” 29 “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

Notice that because of Jesus and Peter’s faith in Jesus, Peter was able to walk on the water. Peter had his eyes on the Lord and was able to do something miraculous. But what happened next? The wind increased and Peter got afraid. We can’t always control what life will throw at us, but we can control where our focus goes. Peter allowed the wind to cause him to doubt, which got his focus off of Jesus. But when Peter focused his attention back on Jesus by calling Him, Jesus stepped in. Notice Jesus didn’t question Peter about his fear but rather why he doubted. Because we will all experience fear, but we can choose to live in that fear or not. Peter allowed fear to cause him to doubt if he could really walk toward Jesus and he began to sink. If we are not careful, then we can allow our fear to cause us to doubt the truth and as a result to sink and stumble.

The question is this: **Is your focus on the Lord or on your doubts?** If it is on your doubts, then you will be susceptible to sinking in anxiety due to fear. And it’s ironic because God tells us in His word "do not fear" 365 times. This is why we must keep our eyes on the Lord!

Psalm 27:1 (NIV) “The Lord is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid?”

Seek Counsel, Keep your eyes on the Lord and this leads us to:

Principle #3 - Take your thoughts captive, don’t let them take you captive

Thoughts pop up into our minds all the time and life can be unpredictable, but it is up to us in how we choose to respond to those things. Look at what the Apostle Paul says in **2 Corinthians**

10:5 (NIV) “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

It is very important to clarify something here. You and I are not our thoughts. We have the ability to think and reason. However, the thoughts in your mind are not you, and they are not your master. Our brains pump out thoughts everyday. God created us with the ability to have thoughts, but it's on us to process through them and steward them well. We can't control every thought that passes through our minds, but we can control what we do with them and how we are going to respond.

The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 10 is speaking about how even though we are in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. We are on guard against principalities, spirits, arguments, and pretenses that are contrary to the truth. We are even called to take our thoughts captive and submit them to the Lord Jesus, who is the way, the TRUTH, and the life.

Here's the thing, our brains are continually processing lots of information. To deal with this, our brains seek shortcuts to cut down our mental burdens. Sometimes these shortcuts can be helpful, but sometimes they can cause more harm than good **due to cognitive distortions**.

Cognitive distortions are internal mental filters or biases that increase our misery, fuel our anxiety, and make us feel bad about ourselves. Another way to put it is... **Cognitive distortions (or thinking errors) are when we have irrational, biased, and/or exaggerated thoughts that fuel anxiousness to the point where we can't function normally.** Here's an example of some:

- Black-and-white (or all-or-nothing) thinking.
- Jumping to conclusions (or mind-reading)
- Personalization (ex. Our team lost because of me.)
- Should-ing (using language that is self-critical that puts a lot of pressure on you)
- Overgeneralization (assuming an experience from one event will apply to other events)
- Magnification and minimization (magnifying the negative, minimizing the positive)
- Fortune-telling (assuming the future)
- Comparison (comparing just one part of your performance or situation to another's)
- Catastrophizing (blowing things out of proportion)
- Labeling (putting negative labels on yourself)
- Emotional reasoning (you reason through things based on how you feel)

Cognitive distortions involve negative thinking patterns that aren't based on fact or reality. This is why it's important to discern whether the thoughts (and feelings) we have are signals to take seriously or just noise that we either let pass by or challenge with truth. If we were to just dwell on and believe every thought we had, we wouldn't be able to **"take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."** Instead, we would be taken captive by our thoughts and open to being overrun by anxiety and depression.

In order to challenge our cognitive distortions, we need help to pinpoint them and challenge them. The Apostle Paul gives us great insight that can be used to challenge cognitive distortions with in **Philippians 4:8 (NIV)** “ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

When we pinpoint the cognitive distortions, we can challenge them with what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and/or praiseworthy. This may take time to learn, but your brain deserves just as much attention when facing issues as any other part of your body. It is a process which is why we need to **seek counsel, keep our eyes on the Lord and take your thoughts captive.**

But let’s say you are in the midst of your anxiety or you are struggling with an anxiety disorder in a particular moment, this next principle is what we can do to get our eyes back on the Lord and take our thoughts captive:

Principle #4 - Learn how to be still and how to calm yourself in the moment

Sometimes what we need to do is learn ways to calm ourselves down when we are really anxious and overwhelmed because our body is in fight or flight mode and we might be thinking irrationally. And when we are in fight or flight mode, we can’t just press the off button. We need to wind down. Look at **Psalms 46:10 (NIV)** “He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

We need to learn to be still. Maybe you need to learn some breathing techniques to calm your body down. Controlled breathing can actually cause physiological changes like lowered blood pressure and heart rate, and reduced levels of stress hormones in the blood. Maybe what you need to do is stop what you are doing and go to a spot that promotes relaxation for you.

Now when you are still, you are called to remember who the Lord is. To focus back on the Lord and the truth. God is in control even when life seems chaotic and disordered. If God is in control, then we can be still and trust Him. As the second part of **Romans 8:31 (NIV)** says, “...If God is for us, who can be against us?” We can find peace and security in God and in the truth about what He says regarding Himself, our lives and our particular situation.

Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)“6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

We need to let God guide us because similarly as we said last week: You’re the last person you need to be listening to when you are overwhelmed, anxious, and not feeling well emotionally. We need to listen to God and wise counsel from others.

Seek counsel, Keep our eyes on the Lord, Take your thoughts captive, Learn how to be still and to calm yourself in the moment and lastly.

Principle #5 - Show yourself more patience and grace. Stop condemning yourself.

As you take steps to overcome anxiety's hold over your life, there will be moments you will be making good strides forward and other moments where you feel like you are making no progress or even taking steps backward. You will need to give yourself patience and grace. You didn't get to where you are over night so things won't necessarily be fixed over night either. Give yourself room to learn, room to heal, and room to grow.

Don't condemn yourself and quit. Especially since in Christ, God doesn't condemn you.

Romans 8:1 (NIV) "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,"

Also, look at what Jesus said in **John 3:17-18 (NIV)** "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

We were already condemned in our sin, so Jesus came to save us. If Jesus didn't come to condemn you, then why are you condemning yourself?

I love how Paul says it in **Galatians 5:1 (NIV)** "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." You are free in Christ. You have been given the grace and mercy of God. Embrace it and walk in it as the Holy Spirit continues to work in and through you. The more space you give yourself to learn and live, the more space you give yourself to grow and heal. And as a result, be better equipped in your walk with Jesus.

(Second Half of Hillary testimony video)

Jesus demonstrated these 5 principles in the garden. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is quoted saying, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." And He goes to the Father saying, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." He sought the Father's counsel. He kept His eyes on the Lord. He took His thoughts captive and made them obedient to the Lord. He was still and calm before the Lord. He showed patience and grace. We can look to Jesus as our perfect example of how a human handles anxiety and the overwhelmness of life. Jesus was God, yes. But God in the flesh. Jesus was 100% human. Jesus is the perfect example for us because He was also human.

Invitation:

- (Speak to those who don't know Jesus)
- Whether you wrestle with an anxiety disorder or not, these 5 principles are things that every believer needs to apply in their life.

- *Which ones have you not been picking up and applying?*
- Some of you need to either seek therapy or continue with the therapist you already are seeing. We need wise counselors in our life.
- How is your thought life?
 - Are you focused on your doubts more than the Lord?
 - Are you taking your thoughts captive or are you letting them take you captive?
 - Are you living off of compulsion or conviction?
 - Compulsions can come from yourself or the enemy, and with a compulsion, you are driven and compelled to do something with the belief that if you don't... then something bad WILL happen!
 - Convictions come from God, and with a conviction, you are drawn to follow and you always have the freedom not to do so.

Pray Out