



TIME OF GRACE®

How to Deal with Anxiety

Study Notes

Summary

Anxiety is the stubborn fear that things might go wrong, a stomach-turning worry that rarely disappears without a fight. As we enter another year of uncertainty, it seems that, more than ever, people are being overcome by anxiety, a situation only intensified by the phones glued to their palms. So how do you deal with that? You think about God. God wants us to call on his name, to remember his faithfulness in the past, and to turn to him during our most anxious moments.

1. _____.

2. _____.

Philippians 4:6: Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

1 Peter 5:7: Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

3. _____.

Matthew 6:25,33: ²⁵ Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life . . . ³³ but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

Psalms 94:18,19: ¹⁸ When I said, "My foot is slipping," your unfailing love, LORD, supported me. ¹⁹ When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.

4. _____.

Proverbs 12:25: Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.



Courtesy of Christopher Powers (fullofeyes.com)

Points to Ponder

1. Evaluate: The church services that are most helpful to anxious people are those that focus on what Jesus has done for us instead of what we should do for Jesus.
2. How might today's message, especially the final point, encourage you as you do life together with other Christians?
3. Study 1 Peter 5:1-11, the context of one of the Bible's most famous passages about anxiety. What do Peter's words add to today's message?
4. Studies suggest that volunteering is a wonderful way to combat anxiety and depression. The Scriptures add that serving others is a wonderful way to imitate the servant heart of Jesus. How might you give a bit of your time and talents in the year to come? Pray over that question and ask our Father for guidance.
5. Do you know someone who could use today's message to find more peace in Jesus? Send them a link and encourage them to listen to God's guidance on how to deal with anxiety.

Homework for Next Week

Read Romans 10:10,11.

Time of Grace Ministry
How to Deal with Anxiety
Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7; Matthew 6:25,33; Psalm 94:18-19, Proverbs 12:25
January 21, 2024

Pastor Mike Novotny

About 18 months ago I had my first real personal encounter with anxiety. For most of my life I've been kind of the logical, rational, biblical kind of guy. I'm not super emotional, pretty black and white. The Bible says this, or the Bible says that. So, I had never seen anxiety face to face until about 18 months ago.

Eighteen months ago, I was working with a vocal coach down in Milwaukee. I was standing in his living room, he was a great, encouraging guy. I personally signed up for the lesson because I wanted to work on some bad habits with my voice. And as he was talking through this and that, and let's try this and tweak that or let's try that one more time; I suddenly for some inexplicable reason could feel both my body and my brain starting to unravel. I noticed my breath was getting shallow and my hands started to sweat. At one point it dawned on me that my toes were curled up in my shoes and standing vertically.

He asked me for one of the exercises to practice being loud and then to whisper but my body and my neck was so tense that I found it impossible, physically impossible to whisper. And the guy went over pretty well. We've always been cool together. He said, "are you okay?" And I couldn't come up with an answer, I just told him, "I'm sorry I have got to leave." And so, I did.

My wife picked me up at his house, I got into the car, she wondered why the lesson was done early. She said, "what happened?" And I said, "I don't know." Even trying to explain the physical reaction I had that day to you, looking back 18 months I cannot give you a logical or reasonable explanation, but I can guarantee this, it was incredibly emotional and insanely powerful.

Because that's how anxiety works. Anxiety is when you get stuck in a what if question. What if this happens to me and what if that happens to me. And what about this and what about that. And where most people would quickly engage their reason, logic and experience to deal with that thought, people who struggle with anxiety, they can't. And one question leads to another and soon it's snowballed into this avalanche of a worst-case scenario. The worst possible thing is going to happen and it's going to happen to me. I'm going to beat all the odds and my life is about to fall apart. That's anxiety.

Yeah, most of us know the Bible says we should trust God and we should not worry. But when we don't do that and we do do this, we feel even more anxious. I can easily name for you today five members of our church who are here every Sunday, who

pray to Jesus every day, open their Bibles and his word on a daily basis, who constantly wonder if they're even going to make it to Heaven. They get stuck in this looping thought, that well, I'm still worried and worrying is a sin which means my faith is weak, maybe I'm not sorry for that sin. Maybe I'm not really worthy and maybe God is really angry. And they get stuck in that thought. And after all these years they still wonder the most basic question in the world. Does God love me? Am I right with him? Am I going to make it?

In the Bible I found out there are 30 different passages that use the words, worry, worried, anxious or anxiety and I want to share a bunch of them with you today. And as I do so at the same time, I want to share a bunch of stories of brothers and sisters who I believe have strong faith but deal with anxious thoughts all the time. And I want to share with you how they deal, so that together we can deal with anxiety better than ever before.

Now before I jump in, I need to say one quick thing. Today's message, as powerful as I hope it is, is not going to fix it. Right after I say amen and say a prayer and you go back, if you worry like before lunch or before dinner, you're going to think it didn't work. But that's not how it works. I mean today if I was giving a message on pride or jealousy, you wouldn't think, oh yeah, I used to be proud and then I went to church that one time and now it's better. No, you're wise enough to know our spiritual life is a journey. And that humility and trust are like fruit that grow on a tree and sometimes it takes time.

So, my expectation today is that I'm going to give you a bunch of seeds that I hope you can plant and think about and water and fertilize. So maybe not today and maybe not even this year. But in time, the Holy Spirit will produce the fruit of love and of peace in your heart. So that the next time those intrusive thoughts come, you can escape them with the help and the promises of God.

Alright, so how to deal with anxiety. We're going to cover four things today. And if you're taking notes at home or in your program, here's the first one.

The first thing that you should do to deal with anxiety is... breathe. Now some of you are going to think that I'm a heretic for this next part; but I actually think that before you open your Bible, you should breathe. Here's why I think that. Have any of you ever seen a two-year-old who is about three hours past his last nap? And he's freaking out, he's crabby, he's punching mom, he's talking back to dad. You know when that kid is being disrespectful, he's being selfish, he's being sinful do you say well son we're going to bring you to church so you can hear the Word of God about crabbiness. No what do we do with the kid? We give him a nap, right?

Have you ever been angry before? When you're angry do you really need 15 different Bible passages on anger? What you probably need is a sandwich. Yeah. And there's a way to deal with that anger alright. So, with the kid and with your own hunger we know that there's a connection between our physical bodies and our spiritual lives. And the same is true with anxiety. It's very tempting to jump in and find the first Bible

passage on anxiety but there actually is a physical connection to the anxiousness that you feel.

I learned some fascinating things about your body the other day. Did you know right in the middle of your head is a little almond shaped thing called the amygdala? You remember that from science class? The amygdala is responsible, one of many things, is responsible for the fight or flight reaction of your body. So, if you're suddenly in danger, let's say an actual lion came up here on stage and roared. Our amygdala would kick in and here's what it would do, it would use your nervous system to say all systems, survival. And it would start reallocating blood from your prefrontal cortex, which is the thinking part of your brain and sending it to your muscles so you can fight the lion. It would take blood and energy from your digestive system, because you don't need to digest your breakfast if you're about to be digested. And it will send it to your legs so you can take flight and survive, right? Your amygdala is this brilliant way of keeping you safe from danger.

But, your amygdala is famous for false alarms. It goes off and it triggers that same reaction in your body even if there's not a lion here in church. Even if you're not actually in danger. Even if there's no one evil in your bedroom at night. Just the thought of it causes your body to have a physical reaction. That's what happened to me that day with my vocal coach. And so, what happens is sometimes you feel sick when you're anxious, right? Your blood and energy has been taken away out of this system to help you survive. And if I jump too quickly and open my Bible and say let's think about the promises of God. Let's think logically about the situation that you're in. Guess what your brain in that moment is least likely to do? Think.

I read a great book last year about anxiety in young girls and the author compared it to this. This is a glitter jar. Glitter, water, glue and I hope the cap is on tight. Cause when you have an anxious thought, you know, when you're worried about politics or your own health or getting sick or traveling or flying in a plane; this is what happens inside of your head, inside of your heart, inside of your body. Everything's swirling around so fast and if I try to preach to you and teach you a Bible passage in this moment, you're just too frazzled.

So, here's what you need to do. You need to calm your glitter. And some of you are going to say that tonight. Let's just calm our glitter. One counsellor actually keeps one of these on her desk when someone comes in and just wants to pour out their problems. She shakes sit up and says let's just wait. And they just breathe for a few minutes until the glitter calms down and you're ready to talk and think and deal with anxiety. So, if that's you, here's the first place to start, breathe. And once we're ready to think what do we do next?

Here's number two, we pray. So, there are 38 passages in the Bible that deal with worry and anxiety. A bunch of them were written by the apostles Paul and Peter, and they both agree on this. That when you feel anxious, you should pray. This is what the apostle Paul said in Philippians 4, he said "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to

God." And Peter thought that was pretty smart, so he gave his own version in 1 Peter 5, he said, "Cast all your anxiety on God because he cares for you."

There's not a single thing, no matter how big or how small, how logical or how crazy it might seem to others, where your father in heaven will ever roll his eyes. No, he says come to me, you're my kid, I don't want you to live like this. I don't want you to be afraid. Cast it on me. Tell me what you want. Tell me how I can help. I don't want you to be anxious about anything so cast everything on me. That's what one sister here in the faith does.

There's a woman who has been coming to our church for a few years who has always struck me as an incredibly strong Christian. I know that she's been through a lot in her life and yet here she is without shaking faith but closer to God than ever before. A couple weeks ago however, we're in the lobby and I overheard her mention that for her entire life she's had to deal with anxiety. And so, as I got ready to speak with you today, I reached out to her and I said how do you deal? And she said that I could share her story with you. Her anxiety started unfortunately, tragically, young; because her father was a not a good man. He was abusive and he was dangerous and so, as a very little girl, she had to learn how to deal. She was always in fight or flight mode; always conscious of what kind of mode her father was in. You know not wanting to set him off.

But then she got older and separated herself from that danger. She started to realize that not everyone is dangerous, that she didn't always have to live in panic mode. She didn't need to figure out how to fight those intrusive thoughts. And so, I asked her, how do you? This is what she said, "How do I deal? I don't. I don't handle anxiety because I can't handle anxiety. It is only through Christ that victory is found." I love that line. I picture this woman desperately praying, God I can't. I can't make myself stop thinking about something. How do you even do that? But you can help.

So, I'm going to encourage you to pray. For some of you in your clear, non-anxious moments, maybe you write out a simple 911 prayer. God, help. Maybe you write down this passage, "Cast all your anxiety on him." Maybe you put a couple of notes card by your bed or in your Bible, so that when your brain isn't working well you can run to the word and say, "but God cares, and God wants to help." I don't just have to breathe and use some physical technique. There's a spiritual power that I can tap into. And so, I pray. How do you deal?

And then third, you seek. From cover to cover in the Bible there are 30 passages on worry and anxiety but eight of them are found in the exact same spot. Some of you know the famous words that Jesus spoke in the sermon on the mount about worry. He was talking about the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. And if God takes care of these things that don't have a soul, how much more will he take care of his kids that do. And in that teaching in Matthew 6, Jesus spoke these words, he said, "Do not worry about your life." Pretty all-inclusive huh? But here's what you should do. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness."

Any of you Bible scholars know what no one means? No one. In Romans 8, the Bible says, "There is nothing, not life, death, not angels, not demons, not the present, nor the future, there is nothing in all of creation that can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus." Any of you scholars know what the word nothing means? Nothing. In the book of Philippians, the apostle Paul said this, "The God who began a good work in you. Will carry it on to completion." He's going to finish it. He's going to get you to the finish line. He will get you to -- have any of you scholars known what the word will means? It means will. And one last time if you didn't get my point just yet. The Bible says that if you're a Christian, God put the Holy Spirit into your heart as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come. Want to guess what the word guarantee means? It means guaranteed. It means that you're going to be okay. I know you don't believe that. And I know you don't think that, but you're going to be okay. And the devil can lie to you and he can accuse you that you're not good enough. And he can roar. But you are inside the kingdom and King Jesus ain't letting you out. That's his righteousness. By the blood of Jesus, you have been made right with God. In fact, this passage for some of you should become your next tattoo.

And I think your next tattoo based off this passage should be just one word, His. Tell me if you love the possessive pronouns as much as I do. I'm taking you all the way back to third grade. Remember the possessive pronoun? My, yours, theirs, his. When you get to that passage what should you seek? What should you think about when you're anxious? His righteousness. If it said seek your righteousness you would have to constantly think, am I doing the right thing? Am I living the right life? Am I good enough for God? Am I right with God? But it doesn't say that it says, His.

I'm thinking about how Jesus did the right thing. How he was righteous. How at the cross when he bled and died for me. On Easter morning when he rose from the grave, he made -- he single-handedly made me right with the Father. And when you're anxious these are the things that we seek.

And so, one brother in the faith told me to tell you, I won't name his name. He loves Jesus and he worries about his faith all the time. He's actually a guy who sometimes gets to teach the Bible and tell people that they're saved. And about once a month he emails me and ask me if he's saved. And I've known him long enough and loved him long enough that I always know what to say to him. Let's stop talking about you. Let's talk about Jesus.

And I emailed him before this message and I said "Hey, I'm going to talk to people about anxiety, what should I say?" And here's what he told me to say. "Mike when you see people sitting in those chairs make sure they know that Jesus loves them, even when they're not trusting Jesus like they should." That's one of my favorite anxiety passages, Psalm 94, it says this, "When I said, my foot is slipping, your unfailing love, Lord, supported me. When anxiety was great within me your consolation brought me joy." When anxiety was great within me. Not after I cured my anxiety in a moment that it happened. God your consolation, your unfailing love supported and brought me joy. Seek the promises of God, the love of God, and you know how to deal. So first, second, third.

And finally, today, group; don't just bring God, bring other people into the battle. There's a woman from our church who has dealt with anxiety for a long time. In fact, she leads the life group we have at our church to help people with anxiety and depression, and she says you should sign up for it today. I asked her, "Hey you've helped a lot of people in our church community deal with anxiety, what should I tell our church?" And here's what she told me to tell you, "Group, group, group, group, group." See, she's really smart.

Here's what she knows and some of you know this, when you're stuck in your own head, you know when you're in the loop, when the snowballs going, remembering to breathe and to pray and to seek, it's really hard. And that's why God gave us this. That's why our church must never ever, ever become the place where you come and fake it. Right? That's why when we pray for each other it can never ever, ever devolve into please keep grandma safe as she drives to see us this weekend. This is why prayer has to be, I'm freaking out, and I need y'all. I'm not doing great, I'm depressed, help. And that's why group is so good.

Proverbs 12, my last passage for today, says, "Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up." It's the kind words of a roommate who says, let's not forget Jesus is still on his throne. And he is your king and he made you right with God. When we can't think of God ourselves, when our memory is clouded and glitter is all railed up, it is sometimes the people in our lives that help us out of it. That's how we deal with almost everything and anxiety is no exception.

So, if you want to know how to deal the next time worrisome thoughts come. You breathe, you pray, you seek and you group. Before I say amen though I want to show you this. There's a lot of pictures I love in my house but this one is my favorite. If you offered me a \$1,000 on the way out of church, I would not sell this to you; because a few years ago anxiety became the unwelcomed guest in my own home. And it didn't want to leave. And so, we bought and we framed this. I'll show you a picture on the screen so you can see it more clearly. This is how my family deals. We look at this picture and we... We breathe. And then we pray not to some distant God but to our Good Shepherd. But our favorite part is his hand. The hand he holds us with, that still bears the scar that reminds us today, we are forgiven for every worrisome thought. And one day soon this same king Jesus will appear in the sky and he will make all things new, even us and even you.

Does praying in front of this picture fix it? Sometimes. Does it bring us closer to Jesus? Always. And Jesus, he's how you deal. Let's pray.

God, I thank you so much for your unfailing love. If we had to be good people to get into your kingdom or above average people or improving people, that thought would consume us.

Thank you Jesus, that you choose the weak, the sinful, those that are dead in sin and you give us life. It is only because of unfailing, unconditional love that we call grace, that we find any hope, peace or confidence today.

Father today I pray not just for my family but for every family who's here. Everyone who's watching. Everyone who's listening. All of us are someone or know someone who deals with great anxiety and I pray that today will help. God let the truths of your word today be the water, the sun, and the fertilizer that helps this little seed grow. So that someday very soon those same thoughts won't have the same power over us.

God, I know how hard nights can be when you're worried and how good they can be when you're trusting. Give us less of the former and more of the latter. As your spirit produces the fruit of peace and of faith in our hearts.

And finally, God I pray that you would clothe this church with compassion. If 20% of adults struggle with anxiety that means that 80% of us here don't. But God as we learned today, we need each other. Help us not to be bothered or burdened by some else's anxiety but consider it a pleasure to walk with them and be a glimpse of your caring heart. God, clothe us with compassion, gentleness, humility and patience that we can take the hands of brothers and sisters and seek you together where true peace is found.

God, we love you, but you love us more. We love you now, but you loved us first. Let that love be our peace and our joy today. We pray this in the powerful name of Jesus and all God's people say, Amen.