

The Problem with Anxiety: Part 2

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[0 : 00] Hey everyone, we are diving back into the problem of anxiety week number two and this is our second attempt at getting a good recording of this.

Hopefully this time it will all go through. We're going to read Matthew 6 to start Matthew 6 is the famous place where Jesus tells us do not be anxious. So we'll read that first and then we'll dig in to the material for this week.

So this is God's word. Jesus says, therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you eat or drink or about your body, what you will wear is not life more than food and the body more than clothes.

Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than they?

Can any of you by worrying at a single hour to your life, why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin yet. I tell you that not even Solomon and all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

[1 : 04] If that is how God closed the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you? You have little faith. So do not worry saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear where for the pagans run after these things and your heavenly father knows that you need them, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.

Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. This is God's word.

Last time in the first week on this series, we defined anxiety. That was the big task and we said that it's so important actually just to get a definition out there because sometimes the first step in healing is to really know what you are struggling with to know what it is well.

And so we talked about the definition of anxiety and we said that anxiety is a type of fear that the Bible associates anxiety with fearfulness and modern psychology does the same thing.

There are good fears and there are bad fears. Really fears are the fear of the Lord or what we call immediate fear or sorry immediate fear from immediate threat.

[2 : 23] And that is when you are in a situation of context, a circumstance where there's an actual threat in the moment against you, your fight or flight mechanism triggers and you flee or you fight and you try to escape the danger through fear.

Fear motivates you to act. It's instinctive and that's good fear. Fear is a common grace gift of God. It keeps you alive. It's healthy fear.

There's also bad fear, bad types of fear. And one of the bad types of fear is the negative emotion of anxiety. It's a emotion of fearfulness and the difference in good fear and bad fear is that anxiety doesn't have an immediate threat in view.

Instead, anxiety arises whenever you imagine hypothetical circumstances in the future, circumstances of potential loss of the things you love most in life, whatever it might be, or not just loss but not getting that which you really desire, not succeeding in a particular way, losing or not getting whatever it may be, whatever that object might be that makes you anxious and you imagine failure, circumstances of loss and that creates fearfulness in the heart, in the soul and it snowballs over time.

It becomes daily perhaps and you create a culture in your soul if you will, a real angst. And that is a definition of anxiety.

[4 : 01] It's distinct from immediate fear. It's even distinct from stress. Stress is a situation where you have concern about something coming up in your life. Maybe you've got something big at work

in five, six, seven days, two weeks from now and you're stressed about it.

You know that you really have got to put in the work to be able to succeed at the something or you're stressed about seeing your teenager drive off in a car for the first time.

Less anxiety and more stress, worry, concern and stress, worry and concern can turn into anxiety the way we're defining it but there are more appropriate levels of fear and concern because they have something relatively immediate in view.

Anxiety rather is entirely hypothetical. It doesn't have something immediate in view. It is imagining situations of loss like your own death perhaps, anxiety over health for example you feel a pain that you've not felt before and you immediately start to spin off into all sorts of situations where you could possibly die.

You have some type of disease. You imagine worst case scenarios. That is the beginnings of anxious restlessness and fearfulness, everything that don't actually exist.

[5 : 28] We quoted from Tim Keller last time and said where he says fear, good fear is like a thunderstorm that comes in and it booms and the lightning comes down and then it goes away quickly.

But anxiety is more like Scottish weather. It's like a steady daily drizzle. It rains a little bit at a time, a consistent drizzle every single day.

So it creates a culture in your heart of fearfulness and restlessness and angst and can really eat you up. Eat up your soul and eat up your body as well. It has both spiritual and physical manifestations to it.

Now today I want to dig into the term a little bit more according to the way Jesus talks about it in Matthew 6, the passage we just read. Let me just point out before we do that that Jesus here brings up issues, objects of anxiety that would have been relatively common in the first century especially and common for anybody in the situation of poverty.

He's saying don't worry, don't be anxious I should say about your clothing. How are you going to get clothes in the future? How are you going to eat? Where's your shelter going to be?

[6 : 40] These I would say are common order anxiety, objects of anxiety. And there's a difference between what I'm calling common order anxiety, anxieties that many, many people face all the time, struggle with all the time, versus anxiety disorders that are diagnosed in clinic.

They all exist on a spectrum, but Jesus here is dealing with what we might consider common anxieties. And so that's largely what we're going to think about today when we try to define anxiety with a little bit more nuance.

Anxiety disorders or clinical manifestations of anxiety can sometimes be much more complicated than the way we're going to define it according to Jesus today.

So we want to make sure that that distinction is in place before we dive in back into Matthew 6. So Tim Lane, who is a biblical counselor, he talks about how the word anxiety in the Bible can be very literally taken to mean distracted or double minded, to be split or cut through, to be split between different masters, to put it in context of Matthew chapter 6.

One example of this is in Luke chapter 10. There's a parallel term to anxiety, to the Greek word for anxiety, in Luke chapter 10. And it's the story of Mary and Martha.

[8 : 13] When Jesus visits Mary and Martha, there's a bit of a pun that gets used where Martha is frantically trying to host everyone while Jesus is teaching.

And the text says that she was distracted with much serving. And this is a kind of a synonym of the word anxiety in the New Testament. She's split over two masters, the master himself, Jesus Christ, who's sitting there teaching and the need to be constantly serving people through hosting, which is a good thing.

But in that particular context, the text is showing us she needed to stop and sit at the master's feet. She was serving two masters, not one. She was distracted or divided, split between too many masters in the moment.

Okay, you see the same thing happening in Matthew chapter 6. The word anxious, miram na'o, anxiety has a similar meaning to that, to be double-minded, to be distracted, to be split.

And actually the meaning of that is built right into the structure of Matthew 6. Let me show that to you. There are five sets in Matthew 6 of one negative command and one positive command, where Jesus says, don't do this, do that.

[9 : 31] So you're dos and you're don'ts. Jesus gives them to us in Matthew 6. And you'll remember them if you've read through the text before. For instance, verse 5, when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites.

There's your do not. Do not be like the hypocrites. Why? Because they're double-minded. They're distracted in prayer, meaning they're split over too many masters. On the one hand, they're trying to serve God and be religious, be in relationship with God.

And on the other hand, they're serving themselves by publicly praying in a way that would up their reputation. And so it says, don't be like the hypocrites who are distracted and double-minded in prayer.

Rather, go pray privately. Go pray in your closet. If you're seeking public reputation, don't do it. Serve the Lord only. So only have one master when you pray.

Here's another example. Verse 16, when you fast, do not look gloomy. Don't look gloomy. Instead, take care of yourself. Don't let other people know that you're fasting.

[10 : 30] It's the same situation because you can be divided over too many masters in that moment, the master of raising your public religious profile in the first century and the master that you're actually trying to serve the Lord.

Now the immediate context before we get to the command regarding anxiety is in verse 19. And it's when it comes to money, verse 19 through 24 there. And it says, do not store up treasures on earth where moths and rust can destroy the people and eat them up.

Don't just possess stuff for the sake of stuff. Instead, it says that you can't serve two masters.

You've got to lay up your treasures in the heavenly realm.

You've got to seek the things of the Lord instead where there's eternal weight to what you're doing. So there's your don't and your do. And then it summarizes it. And really this is a summary for all of the commands.

It says you cannot serve two masters. You can't serve two. You can't serve three. You can't serve four. It cannot be, you cannot have yourself as your ultimate master, ultimate end and purpose and God as your ultimate end and purpose at the same time.

[11 : 41] Meaning you can't serve money, stuff and security on earth more than God. And you can't serve your children more than God. They can't be your master more than the Lord and your spouse and power and reputation and beauty, whatever it might be in the 21st century, like in the first century, you cannot ultimately serve two masters.

And then immediately Jesus turns in the next verse to say, do not be anxious. Therefore don't be anxious. And you see the, in the context, the command do not be anxious is about being distracted or double minded in relation to the same commands, the five commands that have come before do not, the same do nots instead do at the very end of the passage we read seek first the kingdom.

So you have that final don't and do, don't be anxious because anxiety actually manifests in the same way that the issues we've already seen in the other commands manifest being distracted or double minded and serving too many masters instead.

Instead what you need to do is seek the kingdom of God as your true purpose and your true end and put everything else in its place subordinate to that. So every single one of these commands is making the same point that you, you cannot live a life that's double minded between a false master and a true master and try to put them side by side or even take the false master and raise it up above the true master.

Those false masters are often public reputation like we see in Matthew six or self righteousness or security or simply the master of mastering your own life being in total control wanting to dictate your life and control your life in a way where you don't actually recognize your dependence absolute dependence on the living God.

[13 : 34] And so what Jesus is saying here is that common anxieties things that we often face that many people will face in their life are a result of a master or a God if you will perhaps of control of over controlling your life of not living a life of dependence absolute dependence on God of making some object into a little God some object of desire some precious thing in your life and serving and loving that thing as much or more than God to the point where when you imagine losing that or never getting it it creates real fearfulness and restlessness in your life and in your heart.

Jesus says who can add an hour to their span of life that's his rhetorical question and of course he's saying nobody in other words you've got to read we've got to recognize first that we're absolutely

dependent we're not in control I can't add an hour to my life whenever God's appointed for me to die I'm going to die.

So he's saying there don't fret you've got to fight to not be fearful and struggle with a hypothetical imaginations about your health about the ways you might die when there's no obvious immediate context of threat to your body in view right and so Friedrich Nietzsche one of the great atheist philosophers of the 19th century he talks a lot about the human desire of the will the desire to power and Nietzsche puts that forward as a positive but I think Jesus is actually attacking that right here in this passage he's saying actually what our problem is is we all struggle with the will to power the desire to control to dictate the orientation and path of our life to the point where when it goes wrong we begin to imagine worst-case scenarios and we let those become fearfulness and restlessness in our heart to the point of anxiety and that anxiety can snowball and snowball and snowball to where we have long-term chronic anxiety and that really wreaks havoc on not only our soul but also on our body again to quote Tim Keller on this he says that sometimes when anxiety rises up we have to follow the smoke to find the altar that's burning underneath in other words when we start to see the symptoms of anxiety the fearfulness the restlessness of the sweaty palms the stomach aches all the physical symptoms that manifest we've got to follow the smoke of that anxiousness to find an altar burning in our heart to some unknown or little God that maybe we're not even fully aware of that we're setting as precious to us as the eternal God himself as the hope of eternal life itself so Tim

Lane puts it like this he says anxiety is not concern in general not it's not appropriate concern we have appropriate concerns all the time in our life it's not really worried properly speaking you know worrying that you need to work hard every day to pass an exam at the end of the month or something like that we're talking about something different than that anxiety is rather over concern a restlessness when a person is trying to love equally both the creator and something precious in creation or when they are failing to love the creator at all and replacing the ultimate with something lesser in creation I once heard the story of Martin Luther the German reformer during the Reformation he had an assistant of a man who worked alongside of him a great theologian in his own right Philip Melanckton and Melanckton isn't was known as a warrior somebody who was not only a warrior but actually anxious really struggled anxiety and there's a story where Luther turned to Philip in a moment where Philip was very anxious and said let Philip cease to rule the world and Luther understood Philip you have a God and a little God in your life in your heart and alter where you just want to control you want to dictate the circumstances of your life to the point where you're trying to bring the eternal life into the now and you can't do it you've got to be absolutely dependent on God you've got to trust you've got to let go and you've got to know that whatever God is appointed for you is going to take place and rest and abide in that now let's turn secondly and finally to what Jesus says here he gives us a command one of the first ways to fight I like to call these the theological habits of a peaceful heart and we'll cover one now and a couple more in the next two weeks Jesus turns and he says look at the birds look at the birds of the air let me just read it to you he says look at the birds of the air they do not so or reap or store away and Barnes and yet your heavenly father feeds them and you're much more valuable than they are he says can any of you add a single hour to your life by worrying by being anxious about this and he goes on why do you worry about clothes see how the flowers of the field grow they don't labor or spin right so he's telling us here to both look at the birds and look at the flowers his explicit command is look at the birds and see how the heavenly father takes care of them and how humans are of so much more value than even they now if we were to pull this out of the immediate context where Jesus is talking to disciples he's commissioning them to go forth they're they're going to be poor in large measure and so rightly he knows they're concerned about clothing and all sorts of things and we're to kind of get at what is what is the principle of what Jesus is saying here one pastor puts it like this he says really the principle here is he saying whenever you start to get anxious and whenever that fearfulness starts to rise up you've got to commit to talking to your heart about God you've got and this is a habit we're talking about habits here there's no magic pill there's no way out of anxiety quickly instead you've got to habituate your your heart over time to fighting the fearfulness and one of the first steps and there's more but the first step is to talk to the heart yourself about the living God as soon as you feel the first moments of anxiety creeping in and that's what Jesus is saying when he says look at the birds because what he's saying in other words is look at the absolute majesty and power of God to take care of the things outside of you look at the birds look at the flowers of the field look at the rhythm and patterns of life look

at creation and see how powerful and in control God is to continue to not only create these things but to take care of them day in and day out to have a plan even and even you human being are much more valuable than they are don't you know that God is in control of you that God has a has a plan and orientation that he's determined your steps from beginning to end and you've got to tell your heart that every single time every single time fear comes up one way to think about this is to turn to what we call the attributes of God in other words Jesus is saying think about the attributes of God and preach the attributes of God to your heart the attributes are often divided up between incommunicable and communicable attributes incommunicable attributes are attributes that are thought to be not possible for the human being to take hold of to contain to have to possess so we we say that for instance

[21 : 35] God God unlike us is not composed of parts God is so one so so much a unity and a unity beyond our imagination beyond our language and ability to speak about it even God doesn't have fingers and toes and heart and soul and imagination and intellect and all of it different parts put together smashed together like some type of machine or even like me like a human know he's what we say simple he is not composed of separate parts he is one and we really don't even know what that means to say we just know that he's not like us we say he's all powerful he's all knowing he's completely independent whereas we're dependent we're dependent on oxygen we're dependent on somebody else to bring this into the world we're dependent on so much we don't even have a definition of who we are I don't even know who I am apart from the existence of other things I have to define myself in relationship to others I didn't even name myself we don't even name ourselves are so dependent God is completely independent and then we say things like God is love that these are attributes of God that we can to a degree share in God is love God is joy God is peace God is good and we can we can grow into those attributes but here's Jesus is saying when you look at the birds when you're anxious and you're searching for a way to fight your fearfulness look at the birds and say God is independent God is simple God is not like me God is all powerful he's all knowing he's omniscient and omnipotent and omnipresent all the omnis all the he is the greatest and even that is a failure of language to actually speak about how different and powerful he really is from creation it's saying you had to you've got to actually wrestle with that in your heart in other words you've got to do theology theology is speech about

God reflection on God based on God's revelation of himself and scripture and in history and what it's saying is when you feel anxious go big into theology get talk to your heart about the God who made you and the God who is so powerful and in control and of course not only do you need to talk to your heart yourself about this God but you need to talk to this God about your heart we're going to turn to that actually next week about how prayer helps fight anxiety in other words we've got to take to wrap things up here we've got to take our will to power our desire to be in control to stop death even from coming to our lives to stop the things that we expect to lose that we think we might lose and we probably will there will be losses losses are coming and we've got to give over these fears to the living God he says in Philippians 4 cast your anxieties upon him because he cares for you and so the promise there is not that there won't be losses he says in Philippians 4 there there is a peace that surpasses understanding possible meaning the circumstances of loss are coming but through the theological habits of the heart residing in communion with the living God through those fears it is possible to find yourself in a place in time where you have a piece that doesn't make sense even when the circumstances are really circumstances of loss that are very difficult so the secret the first the first habit the first the secret if you will is is actually when it's actually quite simple when you're when you're struggling with anxiety look at creation think about the majesty and power of the absolute God and talk to your heart about the God that you serve as soon as it's an anxiety creeps up you know if there's this object God if this God is real and he is and and you can get into a place into a habit of turning to him immediately when these fears come up and if you can rest your heart in his power and absoluteness if you can rest your heart in the fact that Jesus Christ has possessed and obtained for you eternal life in his cross and resurrection then you know that there is something that you hope and that cannot die because Jesus already did die but he came back to life again and if that's something is Jesus Christ if you cannot lose him and that's the promise of scripture that you cannot lose him that you take hold of him by faith and he grabs you and you're in him and he is in you then ultimately no matter what happens in your life you can be okay because you have an object of hope that can really push away your fear fearfulness because you have something that cannot be lost and that is eternal life

with Jesus Christ so we've got to say heart the absolute God is absolutely independent and you've got to be heart absolutely dependent upon him make that a habit of your heart anytime you struggle with anxiety let's pray father we ask now that you would give us all the strength and the the presence of mind to turn and preach to our hearts about your absoluteness whenever we struggle with anxiety we ask for this in Christ's name Amen.