

CONTEMPORARY CHURCH ISSUES

WEEK 6: FINDING PEACE IN AN ANXIOUS AND FEAR LADEN WORLD

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- In this 6-week series we are going to discuss various contemporary church issues. These are issues which may not have pertained to previous church eras, or they have, but in a different way.
- We must remember that there is nothing new to our own time.
- **Ecclesiastes 1:9 “That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. so there is nothing new under the sun.”**
- This means that the issues which face the church today have been faced by the church before. Perhaps not in every era of the church nor in the same way we face them today. But, in reality, there is no new threat to the church; just an old threat packaged in a new way.
- Week 1: Revival and Revivalism
- Week 2: What’s wrong with singing *all* worship music?
- Week 3: Does God speak to us today? If so, how can I know that’s it’s Him?
- Week 4: Inclusivity, Love and the Church Part 1
- Week 5: Inclusivity, Love and the Church Part 2
- **Week 6: How can I find peace in an anxiety and fear laden world?**
- The overall goal of this class is to give theological understanding and practical wisdom on how we can rightly respond to the issues which we are facing today.

INTRODUCTION

- Over the past 5 weeks we have discussed what a revival is and is not. We have discussed what a Biblical theology of worship should look like and how we should desire to worship God.
- We also asked the question if God still speaks to us today and what that would mean for the doctrine of revelation and the sufficiency of Scripture.
- Then the last two weeks we discussed what is coming against the church from not only outside, but also from within her very walls.
- We talked about the seeker friendly movement, the social gospel, woke churches, the homosexual movement and much more.

- The goal of the last 5 weeks was not to put any group or people to shame, but shed light on what is taking place in the “church” and world around us.
- **By doing this, we are sharpening our discernment and filling our minds with the truth of Scripture.**
- The reason we do not practice or approve of such things is because we believe the Bible says to stay away from and not to practice such things.
- In our day, there are a lot of pressures that are coming at believers. Not only do we have the normal daily pressures of just living, but we also are living in such a way that does not blend in with society at large.
- The church is being blamed for high suicide rates among LGBTQ youth, being accused on not being loving and a whole host of other things. Our Biblical beliefs and practices drive wedges between people whom we love and care about.
- How can we keep our joy and peace in the midst of a world that is not just falling apart, but trying to pull the church down with them?
- We need to look at the emotions we feel from a Biblical perspective.

ANXIETY, WORRY, FEAR AND DEPRESSION

- It is important to make sure we are using the right words and definitions.
- Anxiety, worry and fear are the same things just labeled differently. The actual definition of anxiety is *a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome*. Synonyms for anxiety are fear or apprehension.
 - This feeling can be about real **or** perceived threats. There may be something coming or there may be something that you *think* is coming, whether real or imagined, the anxiety, worry and fear is real.
- “The 1950s and ’60s were widely framed as the age of anxiety,” said Anne Harrington, the author of “Mind Fixers: Psychiatry’s Troubled Search for the Biology of Mental Illness”. “And the ’80s and ’90s became the age of depression. And yet it’s unclear that people’s symptoms actually changed.”¹
- **How are anxiety and depression Biblically related?**
- Proverbs 12:25 “*Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad.*”
- Notice the flow that was mentioned in the above quote. The issue was firstly anxiety and then secondly depression came from that. Just as the Bible says it would be.
- If we do not control our anxiety, we are going to be depressed. Why? Our anxious thoughts come from not knowing *something*. It can be the future, generally, or how specifically something is going to work out.
- It can range from money to jobs to kids and anything else that do not have control over.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/09/style/medication-depression-anxiety-adhd.html>

- The Bible never commands *do not be depressed!* In fact, the only time we see this word in the Bible is **2 Corinthians 7:6** “**But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus...**”
- The word for *depressed* is used another 7 times in the NT and is always rendered *humble* or *lowly*. It is only our more modern translations that use *depressed*.
- Older translations render this verse as *But God, who comforts the humbled...* I think the reason we see *depressed* is because of the context.
- Listen to the verse right before it, **2 Corinthians 7:5** “**For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.**”
- **Even the Apostle linked anxiety and depression together.**
- When he came to Macedonia he had conflict on every side, people from without coming against him and fears that were arising within him. What happened...he was depressed.
- **While there are no commands in the Bible regarding depression, there are regarding anxiety. This should tell us something, depression is a fruit not a root.**
- If you struggle with depression, it is not depression that you need to work on but the cause of it, namely anxiety.
- We know the command of Paul in **Philippians 4:6** “**Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**”
- We know the command(s) of Jesus in **Luke 12:22** “**For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on.**”
- While I don’t know if there is anything to it, but Jesus never spoke of anxiety and Paul only spoke of worrying once in **1 Cor. 7:21**; even in that context it was a command.
- **But neither Paul nor Jesus spoke of not being depressed because they understood the underlying issue of worry or anxiety or fear.**

ANXIETY AND THE CHRISTIAN

- If depression is caused by anxiety, then we need to have a Biblical understanding of what anxiety is.
- The world we live in is an anxious world. Roughly 25% of Americans over the age of 18 are on medication for anxiety and/or depression.²
- This means that the world around us is pretty stressed out, they know they are, and they are trying to take steps to help themselves.
- **I see this as an open door for the gospel, they know they need help, they are just looking in the wrong place.**

² <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/pulse/mental-health-care.htm>

- We can come to the same conclusions as the world, our lives are busy, we take in too much information, we never have time to do what may be good for us and we are constantly thinking about things that we should not be thinking about.
- Living in this constant state will have physical effects on our minds and bodies.

Effects of worry and anxiety on everyone.

- If you constantly worry or have anxiety, it does not matter if you are a Christian, you are going to have some physical manifestations come upon you.
- Psalm 32:3-4 “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.”
- **What do we see there? David says firstly, *my body wasted away.***
 - We know that he is talking about his anxiety because he says in Psalm 38:18 “...I am full of anxiety because of my sin.”
- This literally means his bones or his substance. It means that he was worn out. It is used of clothes or sandals being worn out in **Joshua 9:13**.
- David’s body was out of energy, he was tired, he had nothing left to give. The anxiety overtook him and drained him of his energy to do anything else.
 - **Anxiety is energy that your body uses.** If it is not used in the right way, you’re going to be constantly tired and then the effects of tiredness will come upon you as well.
 - That means that you don’t have to fix your tiredness but the root issue of anxiety.
- “Chronic worrying can affect your daily life so much that it may interfere with your appetite, lifestyle habits, relationships, sleep, and job performance. Many people who worry excessively are so anxiety-ridden that they seek relief in harmful lifestyle habits such as overeating, cigarette smoking, or using alcohol and drugs. Chronic worry and emotional stress can trigger a host of health problems.”³
 - Difficulty swallowing, Dizziness, Dry mouth, Fast heartbeat, Fatigue, Headaches, Inability to concentrate, Irritability, Muscle aches, Muscle tension, Nausea, Nervous energy, Rapid breathing, Shortness of breath, Sweating, Trembling and twitching, Suppression of the immune system, Digestive disorders, Short-term memory loss, Premature coronary artery disease, Heart attack.

³ <https://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/how-worrying-affects-your-body>

- These are listed as the physical effects of anxiety. The Lord God made you and He knows that anxiety is not good for our physical bodies which is why He repeatedly commands us not to worry or not to be anxious.
- It is fascinating to me that the above article goes on to say that “stress is simply the trigger...whether or not you become ill depends on how you handle stress.”
- **That is exactly what I would say as well.** We agree with the medical community that the body is not made to be in a constant state of stress or anxiety, we would disagree with some of the methods used to conquer anxiety in our lives.
- **Worry will steal your joy.** As Christians, we should be the most joyful people around. Not only are we free from the bondage and penalty of sin, but we are also children of God.
- When we worry, we start to act like the non-Christian world; those who do not know God and have no hope.
- **Romans 15:13 “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”**
- When we lose our joy, we also lose our hope. **A hopeless Christian is the most pitied Christian of all.**
- Our worry will always overtake our joy and our countenance will show it.
- **Genesis 4:5 “...but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.”**
- What this literally says in the Hebrew is Cain’s *face fell down*. In other words, the Lord could see a physical manifestation of what was taking place in Cain’s heart; he had a sad face.
- There are other manifestations which come upon people when anxiety is not dealt with in the proper way.

Is there ever a “good” anxiety, worry or fear?

- The Greek word which is translated anxiety is the same that is translated concern in the NT, μεριμνάω.
- Jesus used it above in **Luke 12:22** and Paul uses it in **1 Corinthians 7:33** “...but one who is married **is concerned** about the things of the world, how he may please his wife...”
- Talking of Timothy, Paul says in **Philippians 2:20** “For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely **be concerned** for your welfare.”
- Speaking of himself, Paul says in **2 Corinthians 11:28** “Apart from such external things, there is the **daily pressure on me of concern** for all the churches.”
- What’s the difference? How is one sinful anxiety and worry and then other times is good concern?
- **In Biblical counseling the phrase *constructive concern* has been used.**⁴

⁴ <https://biblicalcounselingcenter.org/worry-constructive-concern/>

- I think this really captures the difference between **sinful anxiety** that takes one over and **constructive concern** which motivates one to move forward.
- **When you are sinfully anxious and worrying, you are not thinking that God has everything under control and putting you full faith and trust in Him.** We worry because we don't have control and when we sit and think about the situation, we realize that not only are we out of control, we can do nothing for ourselves.
- *Practically speaking, **sinful anxiety keeps your kids away from all water because there is a chance they are going to drown. Constructive concern has the same issue, but instead moves towards the concern by giving your kids swimming lessons.***
- **Think about it Biblically**, Paul talks about the married having concerns for their spouse. They are going to make sure that their spouse is protected and taken care of because of concern.
- Paul talked about Timothy coming to Philippi and his concern for them. Timothy was coming to do something, not just be worried about them.
- **Paul's daily concern for the church motivated him to write letters, warn them, send strong believers to them, and pray daily for them.** It was not a worry that stopped him but brought him closer to God and to them.
- **We look around and know that the walls are closing in on the church and Christians. Gone are the days when Christianity is respected, and the church thinks highly of the Bible.**
- What is your **constructive concern** leading you to do now?
 - We should be praying more for our children, our church, our fellow believers and our government.
 - We should be building ourselves up in *the* faith, reading our Bibles with more zeal and intentionality.
 - Seeking our sweet fellowship with one another, encouraging one another, and having a deep desire to be conformed more into the image of Christ.
 - We should be preparing our children to live in an anti-Christian society. Preparing them to be discerning and to think with a Biblical worldview.
- These are just some of the practical things that we can be doing as believers to prepare for what's coming.

What does the Bible say about handling worry / anxiety / fear?

- As we've said before, **anxiety is a heart problem**. That means that it is not caused by your physical body, it comes from our spiritual inward part.
- It is a reaction to something that has come upon you or that you think will come upon you.
- **Here are some of the causes of anxiety in our life:**
- **Psalm 38:18 "For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin."**

- The anxiety that you are experiencing may be a result of unconfessed sin.

- This is a spiritual matter that cannot be taken care of by a physical solution.
 - That means that taking vacations or watching movies or any other way of “coping” is not going to deal with the issues. It is in the heart and must be taken care of with heart measures.
 - We want to conquer our sin, not cope with it.
- **We must call sin, sin**, and then confess it as such. All sin is an affront to the Lord and must be confessed to Him so that the relationship can be restored and/or maintained.
- **Philippians 4:6 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”**
- **Colossians 3:15 “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”**

- Your anxiety could be a result of not being thankful to God and not making your requests known to Him.

- When was the last time you thanked God for all that you have and can freely do? When was the last time that you prayed for your needs, entrusting them to God?
- One of the techniques that is used for fighting off anxiety is simply writing down all that you are thankful for throughout the day. Then, at the end of the day, review all that the Lord blessed you with throughout the day. This helps to focus our minds throughout the day and at the end of it.
- It is very difficult to be both worried and thankful at the same time.
- **Psalm 42:9-11 “I will say to God my rock, ‘Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As a shattering of my bones, my adversaries revile me, while they say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’” Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.”**

- Your anxiety could be a result of looking at your surroundings and not at God.

- Notice what the author is saying and the flow of his thought process.
- He is looking at his situation and wondering if God has left him. He sees his enemies and they are oppressing him, and he can’t reconcile that reality and God being with him.
- His oppressors are mocking God and bringing shame to him.
- The phrase *in despair* literally means to be bowed down or to crouch. So he’s saying to his soul, why are so low...why are you crouching down inside of me.
- The phrase *become disturbed within me* is more of an audible sound. So not only is his soul down and out but there are audible groanings which are coming from him.
- These can be a murmur or a loud cry in rage, but his point is that he is moaning in turmoil.

- Now, instead of listening to himself and being led by his emotions, what does he do. He preaches to his soul. He takes control of what he can do and says **hope in God.**
- This is a command that he gives himself. It is like all of a sudden, he snaps out of it. He realizes that he has been focusing on all that is around him and not the One who is in control.
- Even the **I shall yet praise Him again** is volitional, meaning that he is choosing rather to praise God than to have despair in his soul.
- He realizes that he can either put his trust in himself or in God. One choice will lead to despair upon more despair, the other will be the help of your countenance.
- James 1:2-4 “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

- **You may have lost your Biblical perspective on the Christian life.**

- **Our trials have a purpose.** They are not random things that we go through but are intended by God to produce in us more and more Christlike character.
- *This is why we are to count it all joy, not because of the trial, but because of the effect of the trial.*
- A Biblical perspective sees meaning in what we are going through, though not all the meaning. There are times that we need to simply trust in the Lord and strive for holiness.
- Along with trials, the Lord brings His discipline upon us for our sin. This should be comforting to us.
- Hebrews 12:7 “It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?”
- Hebrews 12:11 “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”
- If you are sinning and there are no consequences, it may be time to make sure you are right with God. As the verse says, *for what son is there whom his father does not discipline.* If we are sons of God, we are going to have His discipline.
- **He goes on to admit reality, discipline is not joyful but sorrowful. But if you have the right perspective, it can become joyful.** How? Knowing that it shows you are a child of God and that you are going to be yielding the peaceful fruits of righteousness.
- When we walk in righteousness, there is peace between us and God, not discipline.
- Whether we are going through trials or being disciplined, the Lord knows exactly what we need, when we need it and for how long we can endure.