

## "Dealing With Anxiety"

Are you a worrier? (Not a "warrior" – a worrier!). Do you have trouble sometimes feeling overly anxious and fretful about something? Who hasn't? Most of us, at times, tend to be overly anxious about certain things. We're anxious about our health...our family members... financial issues. We can be uptight about going to the doctor or the dentist...having to make a speech or lead a discussion. We can be very anxious and concerned about political issues, the state of our country, the upcoming election. Whatever. I've met a few people who've told me: "I don't worry about anything!" I don't know whether to stand in awe of them, or just think, "You're lying!"

And yet, the beginning of some Scripture verses we'll look at today say this: "Do not be anxious about anything" (Philippians 4:6). Really? Don't be anxious (or "don't worry") about *anything*! Let's think today about anxiety. It's effect on our lives. How to deal with it.

Anxiety can be defined as an emotion characterized by feelings of tension and worried thoughts. Painful, uneasiness of mind. Technically, anxiety differs from fear. Fear has to do with more of an immediate threat, something *specific*, like you're afraid to get on a certain roller coaster, or you're afraid to walk across an icy pavement. Anxiety, on the other hand, is more vague and diffused – a generalized uneasiness or inner tension that certain bad things could happen.

*Anxiety is a natural human emotion.* It's natural because we live in a world of uncertainty. Being human means we have to face the changes and chances of life, some of which can be intimidating and frightening.

*Anxiety can serve a useful purpose.* If we have a baby in the house, and that baby wakes up crying during the night, it's good if the parents or caregivers are anxious and concerned enough to go to that child's room and check things out. It's good if we have a job interview to have enough anxiety that we dress properly and prepare for the interview.

*But too much anxiety, or unwarranted anxiety, can hamper our well-being.* It can rob us of joy and inward peace. It can keep us from living life to the fullest. Chronic anxiety can cause serious physical problems, such as ulcers, heart attacks, and high blood pressure. Dr. Charles Mayo, of the famous Mayo Clinic, wrote, "Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands and the whole nervous system." I generally react to stressful situations with a fair amount of calmness. But I guess I internalize a lot of this. After both my father's death, and my mother's death, I wound up with some health issues. Shortly after dad died I spent about 7 weeks pretty much immobilized with back problems. They came mysteriously, and went away, all of a sudden. Shortly after mom died, I wound up in the emergency room with symptoms of heart issues. After a number of tests, nothing showed up out of the ordinary. I don't know that any overly anxious person, any chronic worrier, would say, "This is great. This excessive worrying is such a blessing in my life!"

*Now there is such a thing as "clinical anxiety".* It might be rooted in hormone issues, or an abnormal chemistry of the brain. Clinical anxiety can fall into various categories: Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Panic Disorder, Social Anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, for

example. Often *clinical anxiety* stems from difficult experiences in childhood, adolescence or adulthood. Going through stress and trauma when you're very young is likely to have a particularly big impact. Experiences which can trigger anxiety problems include things like physical or emotional abuse, parental abandonment or neglect. For instance, if you grew up in a home where you felt you could never please a parent, or never measure up, there's a good chance that as an adult you might feel chronically anxious about your worth, or your value, or your capabilities. People diagnosed with clinical anxiety *should get professional counseling*. Often this is best treated with a combination of therapy and medication.

Okay. Many of us may not be clinically anxious, but we're aware that we worry and fret much too much over things! And just because we're followers of Jesus doesn't mean we automatically become worry free once we give our lives to Him! Being human exposes us to anxiety! The Apostle Paul is writing to *believers* in the church in Philippi when he says, "Do not be anxious about anything" (Philippians 4:6).

Studies have been done that indicate the futility of worrying! Some years ago a professor at a leading American university studied the things people worry about. His research discovered that: 40% never happens, 30% concerns the past, 12% are needless worries about health, 10% are about petty issues, and only 8% are legitimate concerns. That means that 92% of our "worry time" is wasted energy as we exert mental and emotional energy on things *outside our control*.

In July of 2019, clinical psychologist, Dr. Lucas LaFreniere, released a study with the title, "Exposing Worry's Deceit: Percentage of Untrue Worries in Generalized Anxiety Disorder Treatment." In his study on worry, he asked participants to record their worries and how they caused distress and interfered with their lives. He discovered that 91.4 percent of their worries never actually happened! Dr. LaFreniere said, "This is what breaks my heart about worry. It makes you miserable in the present moment to try and prevent misery in the future...worry sucks the joy out of the 'here and now'".

Of course, someone else has quipped, "Don't tell me that worrying doesn't help! The things I worry about *never happen!*" There was the woman who for many years couldn't sleep at night because she worried that her home would be robbed. One night her husband heard a noise in the house, so he went downstairs to investigate. When he got there, he found a burglar. The husband said to the burglar, "Come upstairs and meet my wife. She has been waiting 14 years to meet you." I think we all realize that all of our fretting and worrying and feeling anxious over things doesn't do us much good.

So, how can we deal in a more positive way with anxiety? How can we get rid of, or at least minimize, the things we're anxious and worried about? In an issue of the AARP Bulletin, readers were asked to respond to the question: What's your strategy for coping with stress? The answers ranged from "Eat a chocolate chip cookie" to "Have a stiff drink." One man from Minnesota offered his own unique solution (and I'm not sure what this means): He claims that every January 1st, "I give my wife \$1, and she worries about everything for both of us." But he adds, "If someone else wants to be worry free, they can also send her a dollar."

The Apostle Paul has a different prescription for worry. Now you may be thinking, "The Apostle Paul. He lived in the first century. That was a much simpler time, not like our complex world today. He didn't have nearly as much to be stressed out about as I do!" No, he didn't have to worry about his computer being hacked, or his social security number being stolen, or driving on freeways (or route 222), and all those things we face in this fast-paced, cyber infused world. Although, most people back then spent most of their time just trying to *survive!*

And besides, Paul had the tremendous pressure of his responsibilities as a key leader in the Christian movement. He was writing the letter to the Philippian Church while he was in prison, because of his preaching of the gospel! Listen to what he says about his life. He tells the Corinthians that he has gone through countless floggings, imprisonments, taking him near death (one flogging, in itself, could kill a person). He writes: "Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:25-28). So, he had no stress in his life? Really?

So, what is Paul's secret for overcoming worry and anxiety? "Do not worry about anything, but in everything *by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known to God"(Philippians 4:6). Prayer. Prayer and supplication (or petition). Bring everything to God in prayer. All of your needs. All of your honest requests. All of your worries and anxieties.

When we pray, and bring our worries to God, we're showing that we realize God is the source of our strength and peace. Instead of focusing on the things that trouble us, we're turning our attention to God – to God's *power* and *love* and *sufficiency*. Remember, nothing we face is too big or too small for God. Someone has said, "There is nothing too great for God's power, and nothing too small for His fatherly care." God cares about you. 1 Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." Did you hear that? *God cares about you.*

When we feel overcome by anxiety or worry, hit the floor! Go to your knees! Pray! The morning I was working on this part of the sermon I had an appointment in the afternoon with an ear specialist at University of PA. I was somewhat anxious about what the doctor would say. When I did my devotions that morning, I put aside the prayer list I use, and first of all just talked with the Lord – honestly – about the upcoming visit, my apprehension, and committed it to Him. I know I'll have to "give it over" more than just once, but it was a start. A widow who had successfully raised a very large family was being interviewed by a reporter. In addition to six children of her own, she had adopted 12 other youngsters, and through it all she had maintained stability and an air of confidence. When the newsman asked for the secret of her outstanding accomplishment, her answer was this: "I managed so well because I'm in a partnership!" "What do you mean?" he inquired. The woman replied, "Many years ago I said, 'Lord, I'll do the work and You do the worrying.' And I haven't had an anxious care since."

There's this poem: "Said the robin to the sparrow, I should really like to know Why these anxious human beings rush about and worry so. Said the sparrow to the robin, I think that it must be They have no Heavenly Father such as cares for you and me." "Oh what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry, *everything to God in prayer.*"

Notice the Scripture says, "by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving*" (verse 6). Being thankful helps us to think more positively about things – getting our mind more on God and His blessings rather than us and our problems. We can thank God for what's good in our life now, and how God has seen us through many hard times in the past. This can bolster our trust in the Lord, that He will see us through this difficulty too, *if it materializes*. Research has shown that people who consciously count their blessings tend to be happier. Being thankful helps us get out of this negative, worrisome mood.

Finally, the Apostle Paul says if we bring every anxiety we have to God in prayer, with thanksgiving, "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"(Philippians 4:7). *We can have God's peace within*. Wouldn't you rather have peace inside, than a worried, troublesome, fretful spirit?

This peace of God passes human understanding. God's peace is not freedom from problems, or hardship, or responsibility, or suffering. It's a deep peace *in the midst* of all these things we face in life. I've been inspired by some Christians, going through awful things, facing a very uncertain future, who just have a quiet calm about them! The words, "will guard" in verse 7 are military words. It refers to a soldier "standing on guard" – like God is on duty, standing on guard to protect us! Isn't that cool!

*This peace of God is a by-product of a life totally surrendered to God and His will.* Jesus had some pertinent and powerful words about how we're not to worry so much about things. Our Lord said, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Notice, verse 33, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Peace, rather than anxiety, comes when our life is centered in God and His will. The peace of God is a by-product of a life totally surrendered to the Lord and His will.



