

Do not be anxious about your life

We as humans are an anxious people. We don't need a virus like this to show that to us. We all have moments where we feel anxiety heavy upon us. Anxiety and worry impact us differently. Both in degrees that we feel it and how it affects us physically. We don't experience anxiety and worry in the same way, but we all have our moments of worry and anxiety. "Worry is wasting today's time to clutter up tomorrow's opportunities with yesterday's troubles"

Anonymous

If there is someone who has never had an anxious moment since March thinking about the personal impact of this virus then I'd be real inclined to say they were lying. And if they are not then I'd like to meet them.

We feel anxiety because God has created us to be emotional people. He gives us emotions to move us to action. It is inherent in the word. It comes from Latin move out. Worry and anxiety are emotions that weigh us down. Jesus spoke about anxiety a lot. It is what this whole chapter is centered on. He is not trying to shame us in this passage. But he instead is helping us understand why we become anxious and how we can spend less time being anxious.

Jesus knows well that beating worry, fear, and anxiety is not a one-time victory. He understood that merely saying to us several times to not be anxious would make some of us anxious. He knows that just saying the words "Do not be anxious" causes your body to respond with less anxiety. But let's be patient and dive into this passage some to see the fullness of how Jesus gives us some tips to be able to better manage and even overcome certain anxieties in our life.

We will look at the root of anxiety, reasons not to be anxious, and how to overcome anxiety.

The root of anxiety

Look at verse 22. Do not be anxious for life, food, and clothing. We become anxious and worry over things that we value the most. The things we value the most are the things we spend the most amount of time seeking after. That which holds value for us becomes a priority for us. Look at vs 29 and 30 – We spend time seeking after food, drink, and clothing, just like everyone in the world, even those who do not follow after God.

Certainly, we need these things; food, drink, and clothing. They have value. To the natural man, to the nations of the world, they are most important. And there are plenty of other things that hold natural value. Money and possessions, our reputation, our relationships, our health. These all hold value to us. Yet we have limited control over each of them. Since we can't control them completely, we feel anxiety and worry when any or all of these things we love become threatened.

It is at this time that anxiety and worry serve as an indicator into our true hearts to show us how close our priorities align with God's values and priorities for us. Jesus lays it out in this passage that our worry stems from not really believing that God is acting in a good way toward

us. Our worry and anxiety shows us how much we do or don't trust God in that specific circumstance. Tim Keller writes, "Worry is not believing God will get it right, and bitterness is believing God got it wrong."

When he gives us the gentle rebuke of "Oh ye of little faith" this is not about challenging whether you believe Jesus is God and that he died to save you. This is about believing that He is working for your good in that specific situation that is causing your fear.

The root of our anxiety is valuing certain things that we need and mostly good for us in an extreme way. Then we seek to have control over those things. When we can't control them, we feel threatened about our ability to maintain our priorities. This sequence produces worry when we fear the threat more than we trust God's goodness to us in that specific circumstance.

Reasons not to fear

Now that we have laid out the path that leads us to worry and anxiety, let's look at reasons why we should not worry. Vs 23. There is more to life than food, drink, clothing, school, career, and even our health. Our personal safety is not our chief aim in life. Our assignment is not to try figure out a way to live forever. I'm not saying we should be in a race to leave this earth. The things we should value the most according to God are not physical or material things.. Food, drink, shelter, clothing, health, they are all temporal things. Yes, they are needs for us but we were not placed here on earth to exclusively secure these needs. V 29 We were given a higher agenda. One belonging to an eternal kingdom.

Vs 24 – Consider how God cares for the birds. He feeds them even though they don't directly do anything to produce their needed food. They don't plant. They don't harvest. They don't even have a way to store food they collect for long periods of time. They have to get it that day to eat that day. And yet God provides for them.

Consider the flowers and grass in vs 27. There are many flowers that can bloom beautifully, they are magnificent to look at. They don't weave anything together. They don't collect items with the colors they want to put on themselves. They are just hanging out, and the sun and the rain impacts them in such a way that they produce beautiful blooms. God orchestrates this. And these blooms last such a short time. Here for a few hours or days and then you can start a fire with the wilt of them.

Jesus is saying you are more valuable than the creatures! That is why he gives us the rebuke. He knows how much he is mindful of each of us. He knit us together. He left the glories of heaven to come to earth to die and unjust and painful death to save us forever. And then we convince ourselves that in certain moments, he is not caring towards us or paying attention to us. **Isaiah 49:14** We should not worry because in terms of His creation, we are priority #1!!

Vs 25 Worrying does not benefit us. It doesn't improve our life in any way. Jesus said it is a simple thing to add time to the span of someone's life. But we cannot add time to our own lives through worry. Let me add an aside and speak a word of comfort to those who may fear

for their life over this virus. God has the final say on the length of your days, not this virus. Job 14 – “our days are determined, and the number of our months is with you.” He determines our beginning and he alone shall determine our end.

We can't add time to our life through worry. We can't add food to our tables or water to our cups through worry. We can't add rooms to our house or fuel for our furnace through worry. We can't add dollars to our paycheck, or A's to our report cards through worry. We can't add healthiness to our health through worry. But Jesus can do all of these things, not through him worrying for us but by him giving to us. Jesus is telling us in a different way that ‘apart from Him, we can do nothing.’”

It's pointed out here that worrying doesn't benefit us, but it is actually worse than that. Worrying is one of the most self-defeating things we can do for ourselves. Persistent worrying triggers ‘stress hormones’ to be released in your body which trigger tense muscles, increased heart rate and blood pressure, lowers your immune response system, etc. Worrying leads to very real physical, emotional, and mental health issues.

Jesus can tell us with a serious face, not to worry, because our life has higher purposes to pursue than just seeking after the temporal physical things. We don't have to worry because we see every day how God cares for so many other aspects of his creations from birds to flowers, to grass, and He cares a whole lot more about us than them. And worrying accomplishes nothing beneficial to us.

How to Overcome Anxiety

Now we come to the place where you are like but how do we not worry. Great ?, I wish I knew. Jesus gives us some tools to use to help us in this journey. Many of the suggestions he gives here are centered on maintaining a certain mindset which will hopefully produce certain behaviors in us that reduce the amount of time we spend worrying. These take practice and there may be times where we feel like we are losing, but there is still hope because of what Jesus can do and not us.

Mindset # 1 – We reduce worrying by remembering God's provision, faithfulness, and intervention in our lives. Vs 30 The Father knows we need basic things to survive and he consistently supplies them.

Sometimes it feels like we have to work very hard or even struggle to get the necessities of life. God has set it up in his economy after the fall that we have to work for things we need. But even while we toil, we are not left to ourselves, God is seeing to it that through this work our basic needs are met. Yes, there are instances where the consequences of humanity's sins make it so that some people greatly struggle to have their needs met. But even now, when the world has been disrupted and shut down for over 4 months, people are still having their basic needs largely met by God's providence.

Similarly, we need to remember that God frequently intervenes in our lives for our good. Jesus is concerned about the things you are concerned for, he also cares about what keeps you up at nights. Look at the path we have gone through in Mark; He healed the man who had the unclean spirit, he healed the leper, he enabled the guy to walk for the first time in his life, he healed the man who had a withered hand, he calmed the scary storm at sea, he fully restored the man with thousands of demon tormentors, he healed the woman with the issue of blood, and raised Jairus' daughter from the dead.

What's the take away? When you worry about what you cant control, there is a God who can control it. If He so chooses, He can show up in a moment in your life. When Jesus says you are valuable to me, it is not just a platitude. Jesus holds the power to insert Himself into your life and make things different. To change what seems like an inevitable outcome to something that will benefit you. He is working behind the curtain and sometimes in front of the curtain for your good.

Reminding ourselves of God's faithfulness in providing what we need when we need it helps reduce our worry.

Mindset #2 – Seek the Kingdom with singular focus. Vs 31. The alternative for being consumed with securing the things we need in life is the challenge to be consumed with pursuing the Kingdom of God.

So what is the Kingdom of God and how do we seek it? Most simply, it is the rule of Christ being brought to bear here on earth. It is subjecting ourselves to Christ as King. The principles and values that matter to him are what we pursue. Pleasing God should be our chief aim.

And the Kingdom of God is by nature a growing kingdom. It should be growing larger inside our own hearts and is meant to be shared by those who are already subjects in this kingdom with others who we also hope become subjects to this great King. Christ is calling us to bring visibility to this Kingdom that is clouded and fuzzy to the world because of our immense sin.

The Kingdom grows because it is a gift which God delights in sharing with many others from all corners of the earth. He gives us the kingdom in increasing measure. As he gives it, our responsibility is to share it with others and grow to treasure it above food, drink, clothing, and safety.

Look at vs 33. Here is one of the strongest antidotes to worry and fear. A Kingdom mindset is a selling and giving mindset. When you focus on others, it automatically decreases your focus on yourself, and self-focus is strong fuel for worry and anxiety. If you are caring for others, lightening their burdens, it gives you purpose and fulfillment that goes a long way in reducing your own fears and worries.

Vs 34 When seeking the kingdom, being concerned for its growth in your own heart and in the lives of others, becomes a value, a treasure to us, then our heart's attention will follow it. And

our heart giving less attention to the things of this world and our own concerns will naturally reduce fear and worry.

As Pastor Mark said last week, no one is on the bench in the kingdom of God. Jesus sent his disciples out to share the kingdom. He gives us a Go and Make mandate, and this does not take a break for any pandemic. If you cant go out right now then there is still a way for you to seek first the kingdom. Call and check on others, write thank you notes to first responders, give generously to ministries still able to go and make, cut your neighbors yard or pick up trash in your neighborhood. If you are ok with moving about, then your goal is not to exercise your personal liberties but seek and share the kingdom. Your pursuit of happiness or doing something to put your neighbor's mind at ease is less important than sharing the Kingdom. You can still direct people's hearts towards Christ with your words and actions as you move around during this time.