

Weights of the heart – fear and anxiety

An average person's anxiety is focused on:

40% -- things that will never happen

30% -- things about the past that can't be changed

12% -- things about criticism by others, mostly untrue

10% -- about health, which gets worse with stress

8% -- about real problems that will be faced

Matthew 6: 25 – 34

1) Anxiety and fear

- “Anxiety and fear are cousins but not twins. Fear sees a threat. Anxiety imagines one. Fear screams, *Get out!* Anxiety ponders, *What if?* Fear results in fight or flight. Anxiety creates doom and gloom. Fear is the pulse that pounds when you see a coiled rattlesnake in your front yard. Anxiety is the voice that tells you, *Never, ever, for the rest of your life, walk barefooted through the grass. There might be a rattlesnake ... somewhere.*” – Max Lucado
- The reason I put fear and anxiety together is because whilst fear is a constant condition or a fear in a particular fearful situation, anxiety is a fear of the future, whether the immediate or long-term future.
- We normally consider fear and anxiety to be negative traits, but there is a positive side to them as the Christian psychologist Don Graber explains:
 - So while worry and anxiety are unpleasant, these feelings can be quite useful if they prompt us to plan and take action. For example, considering the situations above, if worry causes us to study harder, prepare for the job interview, keep our tax records and financial paperwork in order, or attend to the needs of our physical body, these anxious feelings will have served a good purpose.
 - Fear is a God given trait that keeps us away from danger. Fear may tell us that a high cliff is dangerous, or a shady person shouldn't be trusted, or not to swim too far from the shore when the sea is rough.
 - According to Polly Tig in her article on phobias healthy fear:
 - doesn't affect your daily life
 - Is caused by real threats
 - Lasts only as long as you're in danger
 - You forget about the fear once the danger has gone
- The problem is that fear and anxiety normally affect us negatively and have the tendency to paralyze our lives to non-productivity. This is what is referred to as a phobic fear.
 - According to Polly Tig in the above-mentioned article phobic fear:
 - Affects your daily life
 - Is caused by perceived threats
 - Lasts only as long as you're perceiving danger
 - You become obsessed with the danger reoccurring.
- Anxiety isn't only about perceived danger, but about how our future will work out
 - How am I going to eat and feed my family?
 - Will my job interview be a success or yet another failure?
 - I've been studying hard but what if I can't answer the questions in the exam?
- Some of our anxieties are baseless, while others are based on our present circumstances and are real
 - An unemployed person bases his anxiety of how he'll feed his family on the basis of having no income. It is real.

2) Does God know our fears and anxieties?

- How often we hear people questioning God whether he understands our situations and circumstances, our fears and our anxieties.
- In exasperation we cry out: “Does God know what I’m facing? Does he understand what I’m going through?”
 - The answer is “Yes”, God knows exactly what you’re facing and what you’re going through”.
 - Our situations aren’t as unique as we think they are
- From the beginning to the end the Bible gives the commands not to fear and not to be anxious about anything.
 - The reason is that He knows that we will fear when we go into new situations when we don’t know what the future holds.
- Jesus starts this passage in Matthew 6: 25 with a command not to be anxious:
 - Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?
- Before Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land God told him not to fear
 - Joshua 1: 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”
- God told Israel through Isaiah not to fear
 - Isaiah 42: 1 But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
- When Jesus was about to leave to ascend to the Father he said to his disciples:
 - John 14: 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.
- Paul gave a specific instruction not to be anxious about anything
 - Philippians 4: 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
- God had to say the same thing over and over because he knows that in our natural selves, we are prone to fear and anxiety. But let us take heed of his word and trust him.

3) Overcoming fear and anxiety

- It’s fine to understand fear and anxiety, and to know that God is fully aware of how we feel and reassures us not to fear and / or be anxious about anything because he is with us.
- Build your faith by focusing on how God provides in nature – he feeds the birds of the air and clothes the flowers of the fields.
- Don’t focus on the problem – focus on the source of the solution.
 - Matthew 6: 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
- Take up your responsibility to deal with the matters at hand that you are able to deal with, and leave what you can’t deal with to God.
 - Philippians 4: 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
- Spend time with positive godly people who will uphold you during your time of anxiety.
 - Proverbs 12: 25 Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.
- Believe that Jesus is in your boat even when your life is in a turmoil.
 - Mark 4: 35 – 41 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”
- Remind yourself of how God has taken you through difficult times in the past
 - 1 Peter 5: 6 – 7 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.