

Entering Into - Worry, Anxiety, Fear & Depression

GOAL FOR TODAY: Understand the distinction between our 4 categories: Worry, Anxiety, Fear & Depression. And equip you to respond well to your own heart so that you can help a friend who trusts you with their heart.

WHY THIS MATTERS: In the Body of Christ we see broken marriages, substance abuse, depression, anxiety, fear, worry – and many other problems resulting in distress, physical illness, and immobility. These are not fringe issues. They are the most common struggles we face in our human experience.

TABLE DISCUSSION: What do you worry about? What are you anxious over?

Three common errors we see as we engage with heart problems:

- Minimizing – 'Just Trust God Bro' without engaging the real pain.
- Medicalizing – Reducing everything to a diagnosis, bypassing the heart.
- Blending/Combining – Treating worry, anxiety, fear, and depression as one big bucket of problems when there are actually distinct reasons that drive each one.

PART I. BIBLICAL DEFINITIONS - Language matters, scripture gives us the words to use to understand the heart.

1. WORRY: Repetitive, anxious thought patterns fixed on future outcomes, rooted in a belief that God's provision or control may be insufficient. Worry is rehearsed unbelief about the future.

2. ANXIETY: A broader state of apprehension rooted in self-focused concern that has displaced trust in God. Both Worry and Anxiety are rooted in the Greek word (*merimnaō*). Depending on the translation of bible you read, these words may even be interchangeable. (Ex. Matt 6).

Merimnaō is used 17 times in the New Testament and does not always mean sinful worry and anxiety. For example:

Philippians 2:19-20 - But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be **concerned** for your welfare.

Paul commends Timothy for the genuine concern he shows for the church at Philippi.

1 Corinthians 12:25-26 - so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same **care** for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Paul promotes unity in the body, the result is that each member may have the same care for one another.

There is God-honoring care and concern that we as followers of Jesus are to show for one another in the church. So how can we discern where to draw the line between genuine care/concern & sinful worry/anxiety?

Consider the following indications that you or someone else is expressing sinful worry or anxiety:

- We function as if the possible future event has already occurred; we are not living accord to what is true.
- We fail to pray, rely upon God's grace, or believe God is working in the midst of our struggle; we exercise unbelief in the Lord's promises.
- We refuse to accept that the Lord may allow suffering and hardship for His own divine reasons; we demand the Lord's will to conform to our will.
- We neglect the responsibilities God has already given us; we fail to steward what the Lord calls us to do. (The Gospel for Disordered Lives pg.275)

Sinful worry and anxiety are ultimately rooted in unbelief. When we are anxious, we are functionally behaving as though God does not care or cannot help us.

TABLE DISCUSSION: Consider how you answered the first table discussion. What are you struggling to believe about God's character?

Matthew 6:25-32 - "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? 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 being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious 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 arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all."

Jesus gives three distinctions in Matthew 6:25-32 that identify sinful anxiety:

- Self-preoccupation as primary concern – 'Your life and body are not the biggest concerns you have' (v. 25-26)
- Functional godlessness – Jesus responds with the character of God: God feeds, God clothes, God knows (v. 26, 30, 32). Anxiety behaves as if God is absent.
- Self-termination – 'Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his life?' (v. 27). Belief that all outcomes are in your control. Anxiety accomplishes nothing.

3. FEAR: An emotional and physiological response to a perceived threat or danger. Fear is not always sinful – The Fear of the Lord is wisdom and is commanded in the scriptures. Disordered fear places greater weight on a threat than on God’s sovereign care.

Phobeō is the Greek word for fear, it appears 69 times in the Gospels and Acts. Most often it is either a call from Jesus or an angel “Do not **fear**” Matt 1:20 or a description of the disciples “When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were **terrified**.”

Phobeō is the where we get the word phobia. The world has terminology that links fear to an object or situation that triggers a response. When we lean to heavily into “arachnophobia” (fear of spiders) or “acrophobia” (fear of heights) and validate these fears as acceptable and rational responses there is a danger of removing our God given responsibility to operate by faith.

Two types of fear in Scripture:

Type	Description
Godly Fear	Reverence and awe of God; the beginning of wisdom. Commanded, beneficial, life-giving (Prov. 1:7; Prov. 14:27)
Disordered Fear	Excessive dread of people, circumstances, or the future that displaces trust in God.

Psalm 34:1-9 -

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad.

Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!

I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my **fears**.

Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.

This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who **fear** him, and delivers them.

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, **fear** the LORD, you his saints, for those who **fear** him have no lack!

In the Psalm, David models how to run to the Lord in the midst of fear, and shows the many blessing available to those who fear the Lord.

- David had been downcast because of his troubles, but chose to rest in the Lord’s care and remembered the benefits to those who fear the Lord rightly. (v.7)
- Taking refuge and finding safety in the Lord in the midst of trouble exemplifies fearing the Lord. (v.8)

A Bridge vs. A Dam - A birds eye view of a bridge and a dam will have many similarities, both go over a body of water, both are able to support pedestrians or cars. From the top view you cannot tell much of a difference. But when you are in the water you will immediately see they are serving dramatically different purposes. Bridges are designed for water to flow under them with ease and Dams are designed to support a massive amount of pressure from water pressed up against their retaining walls.

As Christians navigating concerns & pressures we want to operate like a bridge. Our desire is for the concerns & pressures of life flow through us and to God, they don't stop with us. There is a real danger operating like a dam, with the belief that I've got to contain all these concerns with my own strength and everyone is depending on me to hold it all together!

Biblical Concern (Bridge)	Sinful Worry, Anxiety & Fear (Dam)
Moves toward God in prayer	Terminates on self
Leads to action and trust	Spins in place – accomplishes nothing
Acknowledges God's character	Behaves as though God is absent/ silent
Produces peace (Phil. 4:7)	Produces more worry, anxiety & fear
Concerns flow through you & to God	Concerns hit a wall & are dammed up in self

4. DEPRESSION: A state of deep sorrow, despair, hopelessness, or emotional numbness. The umbrella term is sadness and as sad feelings increase in intensity and hope decreases, depression emerges. (The Gospel for Disordered Lives pg.297)

Depression/Despair caused by sin - which leads to hope

Psalm 38:1-5

O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath! For your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me. There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin.

For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness.

Psalm 32

V3-4- For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah.

V5- I acknowledge my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave me the iniquity of my sin. Selah

In both of these Psalms there was a redemptive quality to David's despair & brokenness. David's deep sadness was a consequence of his sin. The heavy hand of the Lord was the pressure in life David needed to bring him to repentance.

Depression/Despair caused by the brokenness of this world - which can turn to hope

Lamentations 3:17-26

my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, "My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD."

Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

Lamentations 3 is one of the most painful passages in all of the bible. Jeremiah is lamenting in anguish over his physical pain. This pain is not self inflicted by his sin & despite his hardship, God is still faithful, merciful, and good.

The Psalms are filled with lament, despair, and cries of abandonment from God's people. Psalm 88 ends without resolution. Those struggling with depression/despair should not be met with a critical spirit, they need compassion & care. At times the best place to start is to sit in silence for a while and hear their pain like Job's friends. Job 2:11-13. Many who struggle with long term bouts of depression are going to need time to change.

Dwelling on the worries, anxieties and fears of this life establish deep habitual ruts in the soul. Taking thoughts captive to obey Christ is still the process of change, but that change requires God's grace and may take a lot of care and support. People don't just need the right answers to work this into their soul.

TABLE DISCUSSION: Have you known the care of a friend that has come along-side you in the midst of great sorrow or pain?

PART II. PRACTICAL HELPS IN CRISIS

Step 1 – Repent of anxiety as sin

- Because Jesus strictly condemns it (Matt. 6:25) and Paul commands 'be anxious for nothing' (Phil. 4:6), anxiety is sin – not merely a struggle to manage.

- This is actually liberating: naming it as sin opens the door to confession, forgiveness, and real change rather than indefinite symptom management.

Step 2 – Remember the character of God

- Our view of God is too small & when we sinfully worry we operate with unbelief.
- The remedy is expanding your view of God: His sovereignty, His knowledge, His goodness, His care (Matt. 6:26-32).
- Our worries, anxieties & fears should seem microscopic in view of God's character.

Step 3 – Cast your concerns on God in prayer

- 1 Peter 5:7, quoting Psalm 55:22: cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.
- Phil. 4:6-7: prayer with thanksgiving transforms anxiety into petition – and the peace of God guards the heart and mind.
- Concerns don't disappear; they are redirected. The goal is to act as a bridge that the concerns flow through to God – so they don't stop with you like the walls of a dam.

Step 4 – Renew and guard the mind deliberately

- Philippians 4:8 – 'Whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable... think about these things'.
- This is not a suggestion but a discipline – anxious thinking is a habitual pattern that must be actively replaced.
- What we habitually think about shapes our desires and responses over time.

Small Group Questions:

1. How does understanding Worry, Anxiety, Fear & Depression biblically change your outlook on your life or how you offer help to others?
2. Consider the Bridge & Dam illustration: Where in your own life have you seen the shift happen – where a legitimate concern became a dead end in self?

Homework:

Complete the "Freedom From Anxiety" worksheet for yourself or teach the principles from the lesson to someone else this week. Write 2-3 paragraphs and explain the benefit and the challenges (if any) from the assignment.