



My Troubled Soul

Dealing with anxiety
and worries as a
follower of Jesus

Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth
8 Studies for Small Groups

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Introduction:

What keeps you awake at night?

When I first became a Christian in 1985 I very quickly felt a call to full time ordained ministry. At that time I was in an Anglican church in London, and the process for selection and training for the ministry is very rigorous! First I had to have my own minister agree to send me on for testing, followed by getting a commendation from the parochial church council. Next I spent 2 years visiting the “diocesan director or ordinands” (DDO) every few weeks to talk and pray about my sense of vocation. During this time I attended an evening course aimed at potential ordinands, and was recommended further reading and preparation. When the DDO was content to send me to the next stage I went to meet first the Bishop’s chaplain, then the Bishop himself. The next part of the process involved a three day residential interview where I was examined verbally and in writing, undertook group tasks and tests, and prayed... and then prayed some more with the selection committee. Finally, having received the recommendation of the selection committee I started going to colleges for interviews and visits to find the right college to study at. The whole process took three years, and as each stage passed I became more and more excited about the prospect of going to college to study theology. Eventually the day came for me to quit my job in the Civil Service and move to Bristol to start training.

Then something extraordinary happened. On my first day in college we had a morning of introductory lectures which was to be followed by lunch with all the other students in the refectory. As I descended the stair to go into the dining room, I had a panic attack. I became light headed, nauseous, short of breath and very, very anxious. I fought my way

against the stream of students, and went and sat outside on the grass. What had just happened? Why had this strange event just happened? What was I afraid of? I couldn't tell, and to this day still don't know exactly what was going on. Five or six weeks later I was still feeling unsettled, and went to see the principal to tell him I was unhappy, and would be leaving college to return to London. He talked and prayed with me and persuaded me to stay on until Christmas and make a decision then. I'm glad I did, because by Christmas I had settled down and began really enjoying my college life. I now look back on my three years at Trinity College in Bristol as some of the happiest years of my life. However, many of you know that since then I have continued to suffer bouts of anxiety and depression from time to time which vary from mild to quite debilitating. So what had happened during that first half term, and why has the problem persisted?

We all experience anxiety from time to time. Anxiety is part of the body's natural response to perceived danger – a means of alerting the mind to impending threat and ensuring we stay out of its way. It usually rises up when people feel out of control of some part of their life, or uncertain about the immediate future. Often it will pass in due course, and we wonder what all the fuss was about. For some people, however, anxiety can become overwhelming, continuing for prolonged periods of time and seriously affecting their ability to get on with everyday things. It's estimated that more than one in ten people are likely to have a 'disabling anxiety disorder' at some point in their lives.

With generalised anxiety it's not always clear what is making someone feel anxious. People often report being aware of feeling anxious all the time. When there's no identifiable cause, people can then become anxious about feeling anxious, and a vicious circle begins. In more severe cases anxiety can take the form of panic. During a panic attack, the heart starts pounding and the person can feel shaky, sick or unable to breathe properly. Serious panic attacks can prevent people from going out or going to work. Anxiety can also manifest itself as a phobia, whereby people develop intense fears of particular situations or things. With phobias, people can be afraid of going outside, of being in crowded places, or of particular animals or insects. In another expression of anxiety, people develop what is known as an Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). This is when people try to control their anxious feelings by performing certain actions over and over again, such as washing their hands, checking they have locked the door or turned off the gas. In Christian circles there is an added element to consider when we think

about anxiety: we all know that Jesus told us not be anxious about anything, so feelings of anxiety are often accompanied by feelings of guilt or spiritual failure.

It is important to remember that however spiritual or mature we are as a Christian, we all worry or get anxious about something to some degree or another from time to time. For some in our community at Tabs it is short lived and specifically related to one situation which may be going on at the moment. For others anxiety is severe, long term and socially crippling. We worry about public speaking (doing a reading or leading prayers, or maybe speaking at a church meeting). We worry about meeting new people (or being forced to speak to them when we are broken down into small prayer groups!). We worry about ministries we are responsible for; about money; about our homes; about our family and children; about our health; about our jobs and about losing our jobs. We live in a world shot through with worry and anxiety, angst in the deepest and most pervasive sense. We worry about yesterday. We worry about today. We worry about tomorrow. We just worry!

In this series of Bible studies and sermons which will take us through to half term we will be thinking about what the Bible says about worry and how we can cope with it. We will look at what the Bible has to say about the things that we get anxious about, and hopefully we will have the opportunities to share in prayer those things which trouble us. And, by the grace of God, we will start to understand a little more about the God who has all our tomorrows in his hand – and begin to trust in his unfailing love just a little more!

Roger Grafton
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The studies in this booklet were prepared jointly
by Roger Grafton and Jonathan Bugg

Study 1. The Anxious Christian.

(Roger Grafton)

Do you know what the following medical terms are descriptions of? They are all forms of phobia or fear. the answers are at the end of the study.

Acrophobia	Apiphobia
Aerophobia	Arachnophobia
Agateophobia	Arrhenphobia
Agyrophobia	Astrophobia
Ailurophobia	Aurophobia
Algophobia	

Those are just the phobias beginning with 'A'! Do you have a phobia or deep seated fear of anything? Maybe you are frightened of spiders, of heights. Maybe you have a genuine fear of dentists, or birds, or clowns or flying. Do you feel able to share with your group what your fear is?

Read Philippians 4:4-13

- ✘ Paul gives thanks that he has learnt the secret of contentment in all circumstances, whether he is in need or plenty. What do you have to give thanks for today? As a group can you pray together thanking God for his provision and goodness in all circumstances? Maybe you have a favourite song or a Psalm you can use to guide your thanksgiving.
- ✘ Paul is writing to the Philippian Church from a prison cell (Philippians 1:7 and 12-14). He has been arrested and thinks that his death may not be far away (Philippians 1:20). Into this setting he writes his letter saying, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice!" and "Do not be anxious about anything". Are you conscious of times in your own life when you have been able to rejoice during times of suffering or trouble? Are you aware of times when suffering or trouble came and you were not able to rejoice?
- ✘ Do you think Paul's exhortation to rejoice in all circumstances and situations is realistic or a pipe-dream? Is he asking others to do something which he is not able to do himself?

- ✘ In verse 6 Paul writes “do not be anxious about anything”. The Greek word that Paul uses for ‘anxious’ is “merimna”, which literally means ‘to be distracted’. What does understanding the literal meaning of this word add to our understanding of Paul’s exhortation to “be careful for nothing” (KJV) or “do not be anxious about anything’ in the face of trouble?
- ✘ What is the difference between ‘anxious’, ‘worry’ and ‘distracted’?
- ✘ In 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 Paul writes about his hardships and troubles. In verse 28 he says, “Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches”. The word in the original that the NIV translates ‘concern’ in this verse is ‘merimna’. In other words, Paul says he is anxious/worried/distracted over his concerns for the church. How do we hold together Paul’s exhortation not to worry about anything to the Philippians with his admission of worry to the Corinthians? It appears that even Paul worried or was anxious about some things!
- ✘ In verse 8 Paul urges the Church to think about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy. How do you think this will help when trouble and anxiety comes along?
- ✘ In verse 9 Paul urges the Philippians to copy his example in life, and if they do that the God of peace will be with them. Would your life be a good example for other Christians to emulate?
- ✘ Paul says that if the Philippians put into practice what they have seen in his life then the God of peace will be with them. Note that he does not say “the God who will get them out of trouble” or “the God who will provide everything they want or the God who will take away suffering” will be with them, but rather “the God of peace”. What can we learn from this?

At the end of each study we will look at two practical ways that can help to relieve anxiety or worry. This week we look at acknowledging our fears and asking for God’s help in overcoming areas of anxiety.

1. Acknowledge your Worry. Ask God in prayer to help bring the apprehension to the surface of your consciousness. Once you identify your fear honestly you can talk about it with other Christians or with the

Lord—talking often helps whether to another person face to face or in prayer. Also, it is not helpful to deny fear or to think that we are too mature in the faith to have worries and fears; but it is helpful to honestly acknowledge our need of God and other saints in the Church.

1. Ask for God’s help immediately. Go to your heavenly father immediately that you start to worry or have an anxiety, ask for his help in conquering the fear and giving it to him to deal with. Ask him to cleanse your mind and give you his peace before the problem get any larger. The Psalmist wrote:

I sought the Lord and he heard me
He delivered me from all my fears.
Psalm 34:4



The word 'merimna' occurs 6 times in the New Testament; 4 times in the Gospels, once in 2 Corinthians and once in 1 Peter.

The references for these occurrences are: Matthew 13:22, Mark 4:19, Luke 8:14, Luke 21:34, 2 Corinthians 11:28 and 1 Peter 5:7.

It also appears as a composite word or part of another word 24 further times where it is translated as 'thought', 'care' or 'worry.' (i.e. Matthew 6:34 "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof". (KJV).

Whenever Jesus uses this word, it is always as a negative imperative (i.e. "do not worry...") or as an example of what not to do.

In the Old Testament the word 'anxious' only appears four times and the word 'worry' only occurs once! However the word 'fear' occurs 145 times. Why do you think that the Old Testament focussed less on the notions of anxiety or worries, but spent a lot of time talking about fear?

Acrophobia—Fear for great heights
Aerophobia—Fear of air drafts, flying, and some airborne substances
Agateophobia—Fear of insanity
Agyrophobia—Fear of crossing streets
Ailurophobia—Irrational persistent fear of cats
Aphobia—Fear of bees
Arachnophobia—Fear of spiders
Arrhenphobia—Fear of men
Astrophobia—Fear of stars or the outer space
Aurophobia—Fear of gold
Algophobia—Fear of pain

Study 2. Anxiety About Death.

(Jonathan Bugg)

Woody Allen once said: "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work... I want to achieve it through not dying". However, as the oft quoted adage says: "The only two things in life which are certain are Death and Taxes". Despite its certainty, the fear of death (thanatophobia) is generally considered as the most common fear to trouble us. It is considered so, largely due to: 1) the fear of the unknown; 2) the fear of losing our loved ones; 3) fear of pain, suffering and/or being alone at the time of death; 4) the fear of ceasing to exist. Others fear death because of regret (reason 5). Here, the prospect of death causes anxiety as people begin to feel they have not, and cannot accomplish something good in life, sometimes resulting in further regret over past failures and missed opportunities.

Personally, if I allow myself to dwell on the subject, it is the process of dying that causes me greatest concern. Isaac Asimov once said, "Life is pleasant. Death is peaceful. It's the transition that's troublesome". Yet when we read any account of the crucifixion we see yet again that Jesus has been there before us, enduring the worst transition any of us could imagine.

We all doubt at times, and it was when I sat with my mother as she died that I worried about what if I was wrong regarding heaven and life after death. Yet it was perhaps for such moments as these that Jesus said:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my father's house there are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

(John 14:1-3)

In all these possible reasons to fear death however, there is one overriding thought that I keep coming back to. It's a thought that is best summed up by a quote from Albie Sachs who said: "Death is more universal than life, everyone dies but not everyone lives". Jesus promises life and life in all its fullness (*John 10:10*) and without belittling death (after all, he wept at Lazarus' tomb *John 11:35*) Jesus teaches us

that within the Kingdom of God, there is so much more to life than death. In fact, what we regard as death is just the bump upon coming in to land at our ultimate destination. Once we accept Christ, he has no intention of abandoning us. As Paul says in *Romans 8:35-39*:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship, persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Read *1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*

- ✘ Have you experienced the death of someone close? Describe if able, how real the love of God was to you at that time? If he seemed far away, be honest about that and see if you can explain why.
- ✘ What are the things that first come to mind when you consider your own death? Why do you believe you think this way? Are they the same things when you consider the death of a loved one?

When facing death it is traditionally accepted that there are 5 stages to our emotions and anxieties:

Denial: "I feel fine" or "This can't be happening". Denial is usually only a temporary defence for the individual.

Anger: "Why me? It's not fair!"; "How can this happen to me?"; "Who is to blame?" Once in the second stage, the individual recognizes that denial cannot continue.

Bargaining: "I'll do anything for a few more years"; "I will give my life savings if..." The third stage involves the hope that the individual can

somehow postpone or delay death.

Depression: "I'm so sad, why bother with anything?"; "I'm going to die soon so what's the point... What's the point?"; "I miss my loved one, why go on?" During the fourth stage, the dying person begins to understand the certainty of death. Because of this, the individual may become silent, refuse visitors and spend much of the time crying and grieving.

Acceptance: "It's going to be okay"; "I can't fight it, I may as well prepare for it. "In this last stage, the individual begins to come to terms with her/his mortality or that of a loved one.

- ✘ Stage 2 is anger. Often this is directed against God. How do you feel about venting your frustrations and feelings, anxieties and fears on God? Do you feel that you shouldn't, or do you feel free to give it to God "with both barrels"? Read all of Psalm 137 and discuss the honesty of the psalmist that describes such despair as to call for the actions in verse 9. Do you now feel able to be more open with God?
- ✘ How does "Kingdom living" affect how you regard death? How can we offer "life in all its fullness" to someone who is mourning?
- ✘ Often when a Christian is mourning, the support seems somewhat cold blooded, because "we know they are in a better place so why the long face?" However we are told in Romans 12:15 to mourn with those mourn. How do you balance this instruction with the statement we read earlier in 1 Thessalonians about grieving?
- ✘ Which of the 5 aspects to the fear of death can you most relate to and in what way does the word of God give you reassurance in this aspect? If not all 5 are covered within the group, see if as a group you can address those remaining.

At the end of each study we look at two practical ways that we can help to relieve anxiety or worry. This week we look at out-thinking it and facing down it!

3. Out-think your worry. Someone once said: "Where the mind goes, the man follows". Imagine watching yourself as you worry and fret and

ask yourself, “Why am I thinking those things?” Think about what you are thinking about! Once you have seen the way your mind works from a more detached perspective, you are ideally placed to start to take control and encourage your thoughts to go where you want them to, instead of always to the worry.

4. Face down your worry. Face your fears and be ready to carry on despite them. Jesus when praying in the garden of Gethsemane could be said to have been facing his fears. He certainly didn’t relish what was about to happen, but he went through with it anyway. We won’t be doing it alone as God promises us in Isaiah 41:10 “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God”.

There is no going deeper section for this study

Study 3. Anxiety about the Future.

Roger Grafton

The Hopi Indians in the western states of America have a saying. They say that “life is like walking into the future backwards”. Whilst we can see what has already happened with some clarity, none of us know what even the next few hours hold with complete certainty. Consider the following questions as a group:

- ✘ Has there ever been a point in your life where a radical, unexpected change that you could not have predicted took place?
- ✘ Where do you think you will be and what will you be doing in 12 months time? How certain are you?

When standing before an unknown or uncertain future, our immediate emotional response is sometimes fear and doubt or anxiety. What will the future hold for us, especially if we are at one of the ‘crossroads’ moments of life such as leaving home to start college, changing job, getting married, burying a loved one, facing major illness or coming to retirement? Will God financially provide? What in the world is going to happen? Will everything be alright? The questions can pile into an unworkable heap of confusion.

The Bible seems to say that whilst anxiety about the future is normal (and even some of the heroes of the faith were concerned about the future), a fear of the future basically boils down to a lack of trust in God. Even after we have seen marvellous and miraculous events in our life, we still lack faith in God’s providence and sovereign hand. Take for example the case when Jesus and his disciples were on the Sea of Galilee and an unexpected storm arrives. In Mark chapter 3 the disciples had seen Jesus perform incredible miracles and healings, and the demons had already revealed that Jesus was in fact the Son of God. However, come the storm we find Jesus asleep and the disciples in panic. Jesus assumes that fear is directly related to lack of faith.

“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?”

Mark 4:39,40

We stare into an unknown future and the uncertainties drive us to a point that we either:

- 1) do not think that God is in control of our lives or that
- 2) we know that God is in control, we are just scared out of our mind as to what God actually has in store for us!

Read Matthew 6:25-34

- ✘ Jesus begins this passage by getting the listeners to look at the world around them at the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. Why might he do this? When we are in a situation which might cause anxiety, why is it helpful to lift up our eyes and look beyond our own situation?
- ✘ John tells us that “Jesus knew that he had come from God and was returning to God” and on that basis, he stooped to wash the disciples feet. (John 13:3) Knowing who we are and how much we are loved by God is the basis of much of what we are called to in the Kingdom of God. Jesus asks his listeners a question in verse 26: “are you not more valuable than the birds of the air?” Do you know how valuable you are to God? Do you feel truly loved and valuable, or are there times when you doubt your own value and God’s love for you? How does this help or hinder you in worrying times?
- ✘ Jesus highlights two areas that we need not be concerned about in particular - food and clothes. In the ancient world that was without a social services network or any kind of government safety-net, lack of food and clothes meant almost certain death! Do you think Jesus only means us to apply this passage and teaching to food, drink and clothing?
- ✘ We may be less immediately worried about these items today, but what is it that you have concerns about? Money? Housing? Relationships? Work? Family? Ageing? Do you feel able to share your concerns with your group so that they can pray with you later?
- ✘ In verse 27 Jesus asks a question: He asks a lot of questions in this short passage! Why do you think he asks questions to provoke responses rather than just make statements?

- ✘ The question Jesus asks in verse 27 is almost rhetorical. Of course, no-one can add any time to their life by worrying, but how can we obey Jesus' command here and stop ourselves worrying during worrying times? Is it as easy as Jesus makes out, or is he being unreasonable?
- ✘ Verse 32 is quite harsh, saying that those who worry about material possessions are pagans! Was Jesus being unnecessarily unkind? What do you think he might say to Christians today who worry about these things? (see 'going deeper' for more thoughts on this)
- ✘ Verse 32 says that our heavenly Father already knows of our need. Do you truly believe this? More than that, do you believe that God, knowing your need, is willing and able to meet it? What are we to think when needs appear to go unmet by God?
- ✘ How should we actively seek the Kingdom of God as Jesus commands us in verse 33? What does it mean to seek the Kingdom of God? How do the additional words 'and his righteousness' affect this? What is the relationship between seeking God's Kingdom and seeking God's righteousness?
- ✘ Against a background of a Gospel of Grace, do we take seriously enough the call to righteousness and holiness in the Gospel?
- ✘ Jesus acknowledges in verse 34 that worries and troubles do come along, even for faithful people. What do you think of his recipe for dealing with an anxious future in verse 34?

In a book written in 1948 entitled "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living" Dale Carnegie wrote about living in "day-tight compartments". something he learned from the Canadian physician, Sir William Osler. Osler was a physician, teacher, historian, author and collector of books, a public speaker, and more. He had an illustrious career including being the professor of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, the first chief of staff at John Hopkins Hospital in 1889, and one of the first professors at John Hopkins University School of Medicine which he co-founded in 1893. In 1905, Osler was appointed to the position of Regius Professor of Medicine at the University of Oxford in England. Osler's résumé is unending, and one might understandably wonder how one man could do so much. Because he lived in "day-tight

compartments”. His deliberate plan was to “get up and live each moment in the immediate present now, and don’t waste any time or strength worrying about the future. It will come, and when it does, it will necessitate one’s full attention!”

But what practical steps can we take to help with this? Here are two more suggestions:

5. Praise the Lord.

As you read and speak God’s Word, accompany it with praise—both vocal and frequent:

“The Lord is my strength and song, and he has become my salvation” (Psalm 118:14).

“The sound of joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents of the righteous; The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted; The right hand of the Lord does valiantly” (Psalm 118:15-16).

6. Take a positive step.

Jesus often asked those he delivered or healed to take positive action as part of their healing. A paralyzed man was told to pick up his pallet and leave the pool of Bethesda (John 5:8). A blind man was told to go wash in the pool of Siloam (John 9:7). Do something that gives God a chance to reveal to you that he is greater than the fear you are feeling. At times you need to confront a frightening situation in a very direct and practical way.



The word that Jesus uses that is translated 'pagan' in this passage is "ethnos" (εθνος) which is where we get our word 'ethnic' from. It means a multitude, a tribe, a race or a nation group. What Jesus was saying is, "the other gentile peoples of the world may worry about these things, but God's people should have a different

mindset". We are non-Jewish gentiles, but we have been adopted into God's family as heirs and grafted into the family of God through our union with Christ. Once we were 'ethnos' - other people, or indeed no people at all (1 Peter 2:10) but now we are God's people. Shouldn't this make a difference to how we think as well as act?

Jesus also tells us to "seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness". The word Kingdom is "basileia" (βασιλεία) in Greek, (it is where we get our word basilica from) which originally meant royal halls or chambers. What does this notion of running into a royal stronghold or the King's presence add to our understanding of dealing with worry?

"The name of the LORD is a strong tower;
the righteous run to it and are safe".

Proverbs 18:10

Study 4. Anxiety about worldly goods and money

Jonathan Bugg

Read Luke 12:22-34

I used to be a gadget freak! If there was a new one, I immediately felt the urge to have it. I rarely NEEDED it but I used to think that if I had the money why shouldn't I have one? Wide screen TV? Of course there's nothing wrong with the old one but it was the wrong shape, and black – they're all silver now! DVD player? Of course but it must have surround sound, with a separate sub woofer – whatever one of those is! Handheld GPS – in case we get lost on a walk dear? Vetoed by the wife. Undeterred I continued: Computer; laptop computer; new mobile phone; satellite TV; Hi-Fi separates system; Car GPS; microwaves that grill; toasters that warm your muffins; kettles that glow in the dark; the list could go on but with every possession the electricity bill grew, the contents insurance grew, the pressure to spend more grew. With a good job, I always knew that if I was made redundant I would have a large payout so it wasn't necessary to save up for things, just get another loan, put it on the credit card. Eat, drink and be merry because tomorrow I might be dead. As the job paid more, the need for more expensive holidays grew, and despite the salary being good, there never seemed to be enough for what I wanted. Someone once said:

“In this materialistic age a great many of us are possessed by our possessions. We increase our possessions only to the enlargement of our anxieties.”

How true. However Jesus said:

“Sell your possessions ... provide for yourselves purses that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Miraculously, refocusing on God has meant that in comparison to the promises of the Kingdom, all my shiny possessions have lost their sheen and even if the money were there to spend, the awareness of a more ethical need in the world weighs heavier than the lust for things.

Why did I ever feel anxious about what I did or did not have? God really has looked after me better than I ever managed when I was in control! When preparing this study I stumbled upon this question:

“Why grab possessions like thieves, or divide them like socialists when you can ignore them like wise men?”


Wise? Now I like that!

- ✘ What one possession (not photos or memorabilia of loved ones) do you have which you feel would cause you the most difficulty if you had to give it up? Why? How do you think God feels about the priority of this possession in your life?
- ✘ What is it that others have, that you want and could easily find yourself envying? Why is that? Think of someone with no possessions but a deep relationship with Jesus – do you envy them as much? If not, why is that?
- ✘ Is it practical or even possible to consider taking Jesus’ words to “sell your possessions...” literally? If Jesus didn’t mean it literally, then what did he mean?
- ✘ What is it that makes applying the teaching of Jesus in Luke 12 so difficult to follow?
- ✘ If someone in your small group trusted God like we are told to and needed something, would you provide it for them, seeing your actions as God’s provision, or would you expect it to be provided for them in some other way? What if they were not in your small group but a member of Tabs? What if they belonged to another church entirely?
- ✘ What is the worst that could happen if we didn’t have all the possessions we have?
- ✘ Do you think we are called to give up all ownership (Luke 18:22) or to hold our possessions loosely (Acts 2:44-45)?
- ✘ Do you think you would be more, or less, happy with less ‘stuff’? Why do we find it hard to put into practice if it would make us happier?

This week we look at helping to relieve anxiety or worry by refocusing and disempowering it.

7. Refocusing yourself. Anxiety and worry can easily and quickly become habitual. Make every effort to think of a more positive response to your anxiety based on confidence in Christ and faith in his love, and focus upon that every time worries arise. Over time, if practiced, your mind will naturally go to the place of confidence and faith when troubles arise instead of worrying.

8. Dis-empower fear. Recognise it for what it is, say to yourself: “this is just fear, I will not be afraid” and remember that “Perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18). As with refocusing yourself, this if repeated when ever fear strikes will become a habitual way of taking the sting out of fear.



“Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread”. (Proverbs 30:8)

Jesus didn't tell every rich person he met that they needed to give up all their possessions and sell them to the poor. For example it seems that Joseph of Arimathea had some significant wealth as well as being a prominent member of the Jewish council, yet there is no record of him being told by Jesus to sell his property. However, at the point of need, he made his property (a new tomb) available to the service of Jesus. It seems that 'neither poverty nor riches' are the issue, but rather what we do with our wealth.

In Proverbs 30:8 the phrase that the NIV translates “daily bread” is “lechem choq” in Hebrew which means ‘food which is appointed or decreed’. The KJV says “food convenient to me”. The idea is that all our daily food and possessions are appointed and given to us by God in the first place, therefore are good things. However, what we then choose to do with them is the important thing. The money in your bank account, your car and your TV were given to you by God. They are good gifts. But how available is your ‘stuff’ to God's service?

Study 5. Anxiety about truth

Roger Grafton

There is one group of questions which many married men fear! They are usually framed something like this:

“Do you like my new hair cut/colour?”

“Does this outfit make me look fat?”

“Does this dress suit me?”

“Am I looking older than I used to?”

How are you supposed to answer questions like that if the honest answer means that you are going to be in trouble for the rest of the week! Is it acceptable to tell a white lie to save someone’s feelings, or should we always be people of the truth regardless of how hurtful that might be? There is an old saying which goes “if you can’t say something kind, then don’t say anything at all”. From time to time all of us have to face the situation where being honest is also being unkind. How are we to deal with these situations as Christians who on the one hand are commanded to not tell lies (even white ones), and on the other hand are told that we should love one another above all things?

Anxiety about the truth can fall into two broad areas. First, as we have seen above, we can be anxious when we ourselves need to tell a truth (which may make us unpopular or even disliked). Second we can be anxious about hearing the truth about ourselves, especially from someone we love or respect.

Read Colossians 3:1-14 and Proverbs 6:16-19

- ✘ Compare these two passages. Although written hundreds of years apart they both talk about telling the truth, but they both also talk about unity. What are the similarities between the passages, and what are the differences?
- ✘ Do you think that you are someone who would rather be told an uncomfortable truth or live in blissful ignorance? Is there a difference for different areas of your life? (For example, are your feelings different about performance at work, how you look and how good or bad your driving is?) Why do we feel different about the

truth in different areas of our life?

- ✘ In a similar vein, are you someone who is more likely to tell someone the truth about themselves, or would you cover the truth with 'white lies' to save someone's feelings? Again, is it different for different areas of life?
- ✘ If there is a choice to be made between truth and love, which side should we come down on?
- ✘ In general, do you feel that you are honest about yourself and your shortcomings even if you are not comfortable pointing out other people's failings?

At the heart of the Gospel lies an uncomfortable truth—we are all sinners. Through the scriptures God tells us this truth because he knows that however offensive it may be, it is necessary for us to know the truth in order to be able to move on to greater things. When Paul was outlining the Gospel message to the Roman church he wrote, "ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." He went on to outline an uncomfortable truth about the consequences of the sin every one of us commits: "For the wages of sin is death." It is often easier to deal with the idea that we are sinners in the abstract, but far more uncomfortable to name those sins specifically. To say to someone 'you are a sinner' is one thing, but to say 'you are a liar'; 'you are a cheat'; 'you are an adulterer'; 'you are a gossip' or 'you are a slanderer' is quite another! Jim Davis (the creator of the Garfield cartoons) once said "The truth will set you free-but it will make you miserable first."

- ✘ In the Proverbs passage, the writer outline 7 things which the Lord hates: pride and arrogance (haughty eyes), murder (shedding innocent blood), wicked scheming, evil deeds, bearing false witness or lying, disrupting the peace of the fellowship. Have you ever been guilty of any of these sins?
- ✘ How do you feel when you see that pride is lumped in with murder, and telling a lie with evil deeds? The passage says that God hates all these things. In other words, when we tell a lie or look at someone else and feel we are better than them, God hates it just as much as if we committed murder. Is this fair? Has God got his priorities mixed up?
- ✘ In the introduction to the confession in The Prayer Book it says that

we should “confess our manifold sins and wickedness; and that we should not dissemble nor cloak them before the face of Almighty God our heavenly Father”. You are probably very conscious of your own ‘manifold wickedness’, but how specific are you when you confess to God? Are you painfully honest, or are you more general in your prayers?

- ✘ James 5:16 says “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed”. Have you ever confessed your sins to another Christian, and if so, were you specific and honest, or more general?
- ✘ Ephesians 4:15 says, “speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ”. A difficult truth told in love can help us to grow, even if it is painful to hear at the time. Has anyone ever told you a hurtful truth that in time you were glad you heard?

This week’s practical steps:

9. Determine the root fear. Sometimes other emotions are linked to fear: Greed: Fear of not having enough. Rejection: Fear of not being accepted. Guilt: Fear of being found out. Lack of confidence: Fear of failure. Anger: Fear of losing control or esteem, or of not getting your own way. Jealousy: Fear of not having what you believe is rightfully yours. Indecisiveness: Fear of criticism or of making a wrong decision. When you are aware that you have become anxious or started worrying, are you clear in your own mind what the root is?

10. Go to God's Word. The Bible has dozens of "fear not" verses such as Isaiah 41:10

“Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

Read the entire chapter to yourself. Read it repeatedly, if necessary. Let the words sink deep into your spirit. Two other faith-building passages are Psalms 56 and 91. If you read and memorize verses that deal with fear, you will build up your faith. Our actions and lives need to be founded on the Word of God, not on our emotions or situations!

There is no ‘going deeper’ section for this study.

Study 6. End Times Anxiety

Jonathan Bugg

When I was a young and very new Christian, I began to learn of the expected return of Christ. I thought it was all very exciting, although the idea of being 'raptured' whilst indoors worried me for a while, as I wondered if the roof of the building would stop me or hurt me on the way up. However, there were several in my circle who wanted it to happen, but not until they were married, not while they were still a virgin, not until they had seen their parents saved, their siblings and their friends saved. There were probably even more reasons given than I can recall, but because of all these things that were wanted first, there was anxiety about Christ's second coming happening before all these hopes and dreams and aspirations came to fruition. Then of course there was at the time, the BIG debate, the issue that everyone was getting hot under the collar about and dividing into factions over. I speak of course of the Pre, Post, or Amillennialist argument. Would we see the 1000 year reign on earth before the coming of Christ or after, and would we be raptured before or after the 7 years tribulation? People worried that they might not be able to stand firm in their faith if they had to endure the tribulation first, or that their salvation was at risk if they opted for the wrong form of Millennialism. Even recently I was asked was I pre or post Millennialist, and I gave the only answer I could. I said I was a Pan-Millennialist as I was sure it would all pan out the way God wants it to. The thing is, even about something as wonderful and full of promise as the return of Jesus, we humans can always find something to fret about and worry over. It's nothing new. Paul had to write to the Thessalonians about this almost 2000 years ago.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Once again, it would be all too easy to get hung up on what might happen (or as was the case for some of the Thessalonians - what might have already happened and been missed) so much so that we forget to live the life that we have been given. However, it is also important that we live an expectant life; awaiting and being ready for Christ's return (Luke 21:34-36).

- ✘ Have you ever felt any concern about the second coming? Share that with your friends in the group. Why did/does it concern you so?
- ✘ If the precise order of events was not important enough for Jesus to reveal them, why do we get so worked up about them?
- ✘ The worry for the believers in Thessalonica was that they had already missed “the day of the Lord” so much that Paul has to address this worry in his second letter to them. How do you feel about this concern in light of such passages as Luke 9:27?
- ✘ How do you feel about this concern in light of such passages as Matt 24:14?
- ✘ If it were possible for you to know for definite that Christ’s return was in 7 days time, would you be worried? What would you be doing differently over the intervening week? If you would do anything differently, why are you not living that way now and should you worry about that?
- ✘ Does the possibility of the return of Jesus cause you worry? What would worry you less: The possibility of his return or the undeniable fact that he was never coming back? Why?

This week we look at helping to relieve anxiety or worry by sharing it and understanding it.

11. Sharing it. It is said that a problem shared is a problem halved. We are commanded to confess our sins to one another. Both of these really work because when we share something so deeply personal as our sins or our worries, we rob them of the power they have when kept in the darkness of hearts. Sometimes, we hear ourselves saying it and can’t help feel a bit foolish – that’s OK, it’s good to realise just what our fears and anxieties really sound like so that they cannot hold us. Sometimes they simply shrink when voiced out loud. Either way, share your worries and feel the load lighten.

12. Understand your fear. We are both spiritual and physical beings, and therefore we need to understand what happens when we get anxious or scared. We need to understand that sometimes anxiety grows and grows because we are not helping our bodies to process the adrenaline

that the anxiety is both causing and being caused by. Go for a run, go swimming, kick boxing, cycling or something that gets you sweating and out of breath. Once the adrenaline has been addressed, we might feel more like praying than we did when we were 'running' in circles of worry before hand.



The Bible actually gives us a huge amount of information about the end times and Christ's return. Large sections of Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah and Zechariah, along with the Gospels, Paul's epistles and the Book of Revelation speak quite clearly about eschatology. Yet despite all this, Jesus says that the

end will come like a thief in the night and "you do not know on what day your Lord will come". In Acts 1 Jesus tells the disciples that "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority".

Here's a question for us to puzzle over this week; Many people and groups have tried to put together a chronology and date for the return of Christ based on scripture. If we are not supposed to know when the end times will come, then why does God give us so much information about it? Also, is it right to spend a lot of time studying the end times if we are not supposed to know the time and date set by the Father's own authority?

Study 7. Anxiety about Salvation

Roger Grafton

I gave my life to Jesus on 21st July 1985. I had been attending church for a couple of weeks and talking about the Gospel at length with my uncle who was an Anglican vicar, but on the evening of 21st July I realised that I needed to do something about what I had been hearing. We were visiting a church in north London, and at the end of the service I went forward during the ministry time and asked someone to pray with me to receive Jesus into my life. That was the point at which I became born again. However, about 6 weeks later I was attending an evangelistic rally at the Royal Albert Hall where Luis Palau was preaching. As he spoke about salvation and being free from the burden of sin, I suddenly realised that I had continued to sin in some areas of my life over the previous six weeks, and so at the altar call I went forward to give my life to Jesus again. Over the next couple of years I responded to altar calls maybe another two or three times just to make sure I was really saved! I was immature as a Christian and still learning, but at the back of my mind was some anxiety that maybe I wasn't really saved!

One of the more perennial problems in Christians' lives is the issue of assurance of salvation. Most of us have been there at some point. We've looked at our lives and actions and thoughts and sometimes just said, "How can I be saved if I am like this?" I've counselled many Christians who have doubted their salvation and who have worked themselves into a worry over the issue. I ask the person, "Why do you think you might not be saved?" Almost always the reason is, "Because I have a sin in my life. Because I can't beat this one sin. Because of my thoughts. Because I keep failing. Because I'm not living up to the way of life I want to."

When I was preparing this study I came across the following illustration, which might be helpful: "Let's say that we are on a 20 foot boat out in the ocean. We are sailing along when we notice two men in the water. There is no other boat around, so it is obvious these two men are in trouble. We take a life preserver, tie it to a rope, and throw it to them. It lands just a few feet short. We start yelling and yelling for them to grab the life preserver so we can pull them in. "Come on", we yell. "Grab it! Grab it!" One of the men, exhausted, reaches out his arm for the life preserver but falls short. "Grab it!" we yell again. He reaches again and his arm plops down in the water from fatigue. The waves slap his face, but he tries

again. The other man is simply floating face down in the water. He isn't struggling at all. But, the first man is trying for that life preserver. He is fighting against the ocean, the wind, and the waves, all of which are greater than he is. I often ask people who doubt their salvation, "Which one of the two men in the water is alive?" Always, the response is, "The one reaching for the life preserver." "Right", I say. "He is struggling for life. Dead people don't struggle for life.... and spiritually dead people do not struggle against their sin. Only those who are dead, who have no life in them, do not struggle. The fact that you are struggling against your sin is one very good sign that you are very much alive in Christ. If you were not struggling at all, then it might be true that you weren't saved. But, since you war against your sins, then it sure sounds like you're saved to me." (Matt Slick of the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry)

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

- ✘ According to verse 4, why did God save us? What does that mean?
- ✘ In this passage Paul states twice the means by which we are saved (in verses 5, and 8). How have we been saved? What do you think that means?
- ✘ Paul compares grace on the one hand with works on the other. What do you understand by the word 'works' in this context?
- ✘ Paul writes that we are NOT saved by our works/deeds/lifestyle/goodness (verse 9) and in consequence we have nothing to boast in—we are God's workmanship alone! What does it mean to you to be God's workmanship? Do you feel like a work of great craftsmanship? If not, is the Bible lying in verse 9? Perhaps you sometimes feel that verses like this apply to everyone else, but not you!
- ✘ The Gospel is all about what God has done in Christ Jesus, not what we have done, are doing or will do in the future. It is all about Jesus and what he has done, not about you and what you have done! Read Isaiah 53:5, 6, 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Galatians 3:1-3. What did God do with our sins?
- ✘ Read Philippians 1:3-6. Has God finished his work in us yet? What does it mean that he has work to carry on to completion in us?
- ✘ If we are a new creation in Christ, and the workmanship of God,

why do we keep sinning? Can a saved person still be a sinner? Does God's love for us change when we let him down?

- ✘ Read John 10:27-28. As well as assuring us of our salvation, these verses hint at there being an enemy who wants to try and snatch us away from Jesus. Jesus says that he cannot succeed, but it is a helpful reminder that Satan still has an interest in bothering us! How does this help us understand our propensity to continue sinning, and the doubts that assail us from time to time?

Just two final practical steps we can take to address our worries and anxieties:

13. Make a decision. Make a mental decision to believe and rely on God more than your emotions. You may not get to the place of complete trust immediately. The growth of faith takes time and testing to see that the Lord is faithful in crisis after crisis. When fear strikes, start saying to him, "God, You are in control of my life—not just some of the time, but always".

14. Make a choice. When it comes to action, choose to act according to God's Word, and not according to your feelings. Choose to believe in God, who not only loves you and cares for you, but is always available to you. Remember: He is sovereign over all things. As you learn to trust the Father, I have no doubt that he will melt away your crippling fears so you can truly experience the depth of his abiding peace.



In Greek the word that we translate as 'salvation' is 'sozo'. This word has a number of connotations: make safe, deliver, protect, preserve, do well and heal. This idea of healing being part of salvation is particularly interesting. When we think about sin, salvation and healing, we might turn to a passage such as Isaiah 53:5

(quoted by Peter in 1 Peter 2:24):

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed”.

We need saving from sin; we need rescuing from sin; we also need healing from sin. Sin is a disease. It is a hereditary disease that we are born with through Adam, and which we are healed of through Christ.

When we think about besetting habitual sins that we don't seem to be able to get free from, or see other people struggling year after year with the same weaknesses and failings, how does the notion that sin is a sickness and a disease affect the way we think? Does it increase our compassion and understanding in situations where we might otherwise be judgemental?

Study 8. Overcoming anxiety

Jonathan Bugg

If you were to search the internet for ways to overcome anxiety, you could get anxious about which is the best solution to follow! You will be advised to try all sorts of remedies such as: distraction, comfort yourself, keep a journal, take regular exercise, relaxation classes, yoga, massage, investigate Intestinal disturbances, take nutritional supplements, use aromatherapy oils, cut down or out caffeine and alcohol, have Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, hypnosis or even 'neuro-linguistic programming' (whatever that is) and who knows, maybe some of them even help. You will find 10 step programmes to Overcoming Fear, 5 steps to Leaving Fear behind, 3 steps to Beat Anxiety, and it all seems that the less we focus on Jesus, the more complicated dealing with anxieties, worries and life gets!

Jesus tells us in Luke 12:22-34 simply "Do not worry ... do not be afraid ... provide ... for yourselves ... a treasure in heaven ... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". Paul builds on this instruction in Philippians.

Read Philippians 4:1-7

Paul tells us to Rejoice and be Thankful, to NOT be anxious but rather Pray. Interestingly, when anxious or fearful we often pray (normally "Oh God help me!") but forget to Rejoice, to be Thankful, and NOT to be anxious (the other 3 things which require us to do something). Yet Paul suggests that obedience to his instruction will result in our experiencing the peace of God (despite all the stonings, shipwrecks, persecutions and imprisonments that he had known). Perhaps the answer to how to overcome our own anxiety is to follow his example and instruction. Matt Redman wrote and we often sing:

Blessed be Your name
When the sun's shining down on me
When the world's 'all as it should be'
Blessed be Your name

Blessed be Your name
On the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering
Blessed be Your name

Sometimes it's very easy to sing about worshipping God until there is genuine pain, fear and anxiety. Then it gets easy to become wrapped up in our own anxiety and worries to the point where we forget to still worship the God who has given us life and looked after us thus far.

It may take time, but you can overcome anxiety and bring every thought into the submission of Christ. Learn to be at peace ... Remember, Jesus fought through the biggest panic attack of all time in the Garden of Gethsemane. Fear was relentless in its attack against him. But he did what we need to do ... He pressed on through, felt the fear and did it anyway!!! Courage is not the absence of fear but rather action in spite of fear.

- ✘ Have you ever rejoiced and/or lost yourself in worship when feeling anxious or scared, worried or depressed? How did you feel after? Remember, feelings are nothing to do with God's work or his presence in our lives.
- ✘ How did you feel when you read of Gethsemane as a panic attack? Do you find this idea offensive? Why is it so uncomfortable to think this way when we know that Jesus experienced all the same feelings as we do?
- ✘ Read Philippians 4 verse 6 again, along with Matthew 6:34, Mark 13:11, Luke 10:41-42 and Luke 12:25. How much does anxiety and worry help us deal with difficult situations?
- ✘ As Christians, how much are we supposed to be anxious about things?
- ✘ There is an old saying which goes, "a problem shared is a problem halved". Is this true?
- ✘ People sometime say, "you don't have to go to church to be a Christian". Why is being part of a church fellowship, being regular at small group and services, and being in accountable relationships with other believers so important in regard to the subject of worry and anxiety?
- ✘ Over the last few weeks we have looked at some practical steps to dealing with anxiety. Which do you think are the most helpful? Are different methods helpful in different circumstances?

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