

Anxiety and Frustration

What is anxiety?

READ Psalm 55:3-6

- How would we answer this question from Psalm 55:3-6?

[Anxiety is a whole-person response to a perceived loss]

Like anger, anxiety often ripples through our entire being mind, emotions and body. It doesn't always have that *complete* effect, but it always affects some part of who we are and what we do.

We said it is a whole-person response to a perceived loss.¹

- Where does it start?

*[It is a response driven by the **mind**, the values, and the treasures]*

[Romans 7:7]

[Romans 12:2]

[1 Corinthians 2:1-4]

[Philippians 4:8; cf. 4:6]

[1 Peter 1:13-14]

[2 Peter 1:3, 8]

These Bible authors expect that we would be saved and sanctified (grown in our faith) by our knowledge; that as we know Him and think like Him, we would experience abundant joy.

It stands to reason that the foundation of our anxiety, which, as Bridges tells us has more to do with our knowledge of God, is our minds.

But there is more at work than what we think about things.

READ Matthew 6:19-24.

- What is competing in vv. 19-21?

[Treasures – earthly or heavenly]

- What is competing in vv. 22-23?

[Influences – earthly (dark) or heavenly (light)]

- What is competing in v. 24?

[Masters – earthly (e.g., money) or heavenly (God)]

Then we have this long discourse on worry. **Anxiety is about agendas.**

You and I get anxious or fearful when something that matters to us is threatened; when we perceive that we might lose something important to us.

This is a God-given inclination so that we would be unselfishly protect those things that matter to God; those things He has given us. We are fearful at times so that we are drawn out of our own small worlds and alert to other things.

¹ I would differentiate “anxiety” from “anger” in its response object: “I may lose” vs. “That’s not right.”

This would include our spouses, our children, our family name, our church, our freedom, justice, etc. There are many good things that God has given to us that He expects us to fight for and keep. He has given us this inclination so that we would be alert and fight.

- Why could this be?

[1 Peter 5:8-10 – we have a real enemy in this world]

You ask, “What about Philippians 4:6, ‘do not be anxious about anything?’”

Anxiety – defined.

We looked already at a definition of anxiety – a whole person response to a perceived loss. Let’s consider the words themselves. The word-group that “anxiety” is a part produces 34 occurrences in the Bible; in other words, “anxieties,” “anxiety,” “anxious,” and “anxiously” occur 34 times.

The root sense of the word is either positive or negative. In a positive sense, it means *to care for, be concerned about or scan minutely*. You can see how in this way, God gives us the inclination to guard, investigate and protect things.

But, Philippians 4:6’s use of the word is not about this. It represents the negative sense of the word (cf. Philippians 2:20). Negatively, the word group has the sense of *to be overly concerned about, to be worried about, or to be heavy-laden with many cares*.

- When does the inclination to protect cross over to sinful-preoccupation?

[Our agenda supplants God’s]

[What matters to Him is “out of touch” in our minds]

[His goals are too risky or uncertain]

[Our view of His requirements is too low; His requirements are “too hard”]

Anxiety, like anger, responds instinctively in protective ways. This is seen in our *physiological* responses by example. Our threatened agenda maps onto our bodies in our emotions, our physical responses and in our behaviors.

Anxiety isn’t *from* our bodies. Our emotions don’t make us anxious. Anxiety isn’t properly understood as an emotion – it is something **bigger** than that.

Listen to David Powlison:

Consider when you become anxious, preoccupied, and filled with fretful concern. Something happened –you can’t get it off your mind. Something is happening now—you’re consumed with it. Something will happen tomorrow—your mind turns it over and over, chewing on every possible contingency.

As the sin of worry tightens its unpleasant hold on your soul, perhaps you jump for some escapist quick fix: raid the icebox, watch TV, masturbate, read a novel, go shopping, drink a beer, play a game. Or perhaps you mobilize to seize control: make a string of phone calls, work all night, build a faction of supporters, clean your house, get mad.

*Why is all this going on? As a Christian **you profess** that God controls all things, and works everything to His glory and your ultimate well-being. **You profess** that God is your rock and refuge, a very present help in whatever troubles you face. **You profess** to worship Him, trust Him, love Him, obey Him.*

*But in that moment—hour, day, season —of anxiety, escape, or drivenness, you live as if you needed to **control** all things. You live as if money, or someone’s approval, or a “successful” sermon, or your grade on an exam, or good health, or avoiding conflict, or getting your way, or [fill in the blank]...matters more than trusting and loving God. You live as if some temporary good feeling could provide you refuge, as if our actions could make the world right.*

Your functional god competes with your professed God.²

Anxiety is never located in the air; we aren’t just “anxious” or “nervous” or “stressed;” it is always fruit of a prior value or commitment.

Anxiety is about agendas. We saw that from the passage in Matthew. We are terrified to lose – face, money, health care, respect or approval.

What is anxiety really saying?³

1. It has a goal

The goal of an anxious life is some kind of enduring benefit to the self: preservation, certainty, safety, or security. When a situation is confronted and anxiety is the fruit, what motivates this is the fear of some kind of loss to self.

When our agendas are threatened, all that we can see or understand is how we will lose. This is a primary problem for marriages.

- Husbands calculate the gain / loss factor of leading a family and determine to do only what is absorbable in loss terms. The safe things.
- Wives do some calculating, too, and determine to submit to their husbands not as Paul said, “in everything” but in some things. The safe things.

2. It has a perspective

Years ago, when I taught *James*, I said godly wisdom is a three-fold perspective:

1. I am ignorant, God is not
2. God is in control, I am not
3. God is pursuing His glory and that’s good for me

That is God’s agenda: life as He sees it.

Let’s rewrite these three phrases so we can see how anxiety is really an agenda issue:

1. I am ignorant, God is not
God is ignorant, I am not

- How is that an agenda statement?

[What happens to me / around me needs to be just as I think it should be]

[I have determined what wisdom is, what is correct and evaluate everything by that standard]

[God is wrong]

² David Powlison, “X-ray Questions” from *Seeing with New Eyes* (Philipsburg; Presbyterian and Reformed; 2003), 130.

³Adapted from John Henderson, *Equipped to Counsel*, 210-212.

- How is that a recipe for anxiety?
[What if something else happens that I don't think should happen? I can only control a few things in life]
[If God doesn't know what's up, then I better figure it out]
[If God doesn't care that I think things should be different, that's not good]
[I really do know that I don't know, ergo, anxiety]
2. God is in control, I am not
God is not in control, I need to be
- How is that an agenda statement?
[I know what God being in control means and this isn't it]
[God is not in control]
[Someone else is in control]
 - How is that a recipe for anxiety?
[I'm not yet in control; other things might happen that I won't like]
[Who is in control if God is not?]
3. God is pursuing His glory and that's good for me
Whatever God is doing is not good for me
- How is that an agenda statement?
[God's glory is a bad thing]
[I need to be God's focus not His glory]
 - How is that a recipe for anxiety?
[What if He won't change?]
[What if He really doesn't exist?]

When our preservation and safety is at the forefront of our perspective and commitment, danger appears everywhere. All of our data-gathering is biased to produce a result that is: “will I lose something here or not?” God has vacated our view; He is no longer at the center of decision-making.

3. It creates a lifestyle

This perspective bears fruit in a lifestyle.

If fear of some kind of personal loss is the primary motivator in our decision-making process, then we will spend enormous energy pursuing our plans rather than God's.

We will control, avoid, attack or escape (211) depending on what is called for.

4. It has a result

When I preached on lust, I said “lifestyles of lust lead to hell.” That is because one who leads such a lifestyle is not a Christian; Christians struggle with lust (fight against it) but ultimately win the day-to-day battles because Christ has won the war.

“Lifestyles of anxiety lead to hell.” So, in the same way, the one who is constantly controlling, anxious and prone to obsession is not likely a believer in Christ. Because, in the same way that Christ won the lust-war, He also won the anxiety-war for us.

Still, as with lust, Christians must do battle against the unknown. For a Christian to be anxious is for him to shrink his life down to what he can control or manage or withstand. Believers will often commit to lifestyles of anxiety where we order our circumstances so that we minimize loss and pain to ourselves.

Listen to what Paul Tripp says in his book, *A Quest for More*:

The effect of sin is very similar to DePoix’s invention [shrink wrap], but its influence is much more comprehensive. Sin causes fundamental changes in the “molecules” of my heart. No longer is my heart driven by a deep-seated love for God. No longer is my heart motivated by a genuine care for others. No longer do I carry around a sense of responsibility for the surrounding created world. No longer is every decision I make shaped by a clear sense of what is morally right and morally wrong. The DNA of sin is selfishness, and it shrinks the size of my universe to the size of one. Sin creates the ultimate sin dynamic....In the shrunken kingdom of self there is no functional room for God or others.⁴

How is it handled?

Bridges tells us “don’t worry” is good advice unless it comes from the Bible and then it is a moral command. Clearly, anxiety and worry is sin and we need a plan!

Anxiety isn’t caused by our bodies.

Anxiety isn’t caused by our circumstances.

Anxiety is about our **agendas**. In order to deal with anxiety, we need to attack our unbelieving agendas.

1. Surrender of self: Matthew 26:39, 42

My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will but as you will....My Father if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done

Jesus provides us the example of what to do with anxiety. We surely don’t suffer and aren’t burdened as He is – He even knew what was to come in the future (we don’t).

- a. Trust God’s agenda especially when it seems dire: 1 Peter 2:23
- b. Remember the truth about your relationship to God as His child: 1 John 3:1
- c. Trust in an eternal, delightful work of God: Acts 20:22-24, Hebrews 11:24-26

2. Repentance for failure

- a. Anxiety is sin: Luke 12:22-24, Philippians 4:6
- b. Confess sin, pray, be healed: James 5:16

3. “Discipline the body to stand against the results of anxiety” (Henderson)

- a. When you feel it rising in your stomach or your face, you must stand against it with the truth.

⁴ Paul David Tripp, *A Quest for More* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press; 2007); 86.

Increased heart rate and blood pressure
Blood flow to major organs
Immune and digestive systems are scaled back
Pupils dilate
Increased sweating

These are symptoms of a thought pattern – they are resistible. When anxiety comes upon us, we need to be asking ourselves about the change.

4. Turn to God in faith

a. God is sovereign: Psalm 93, Acts 2:23, Genesis 50:20

The assertion of God's absolute sovereignty in creation, providence and grace is basic to biblical belief and biblical praise⁵

b. God is good: Psalm 136:1, Romans 3:22-24, 5:5-8, 8:31-39

c. Pray, don't panic: Luke 18:7-8

5. Turn to God in hope

An ethic of hope pervades the New Testament.

It is an ethic of pilgrimage: one should see oneself in this world as a stranger traveling home....

It is an ethic of patience "if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently" (Romans 8:25)....

And it is an ethic of power: the hope gives strength and confidence, energizing effort for running the race, fighting the good fight, enduring the "light and momentary troubles" (2 Corinthians 4:17)⁶

a. Hope is God's intent for us: Romans 15:4

b. Christ is our hope: 1 Timothy 1:1; 1 Peter 1:13

c. We serve a God of hope: Romans 15:13

6. Love biblically

Anxiety is a lifestyle centered on "me." The antidote to this self-centeredness is living for others, loving. One way to fight against anxiety is to serve. It is very easy to be anxious alone, isn't it?

a. God more than self: Gen 22:12; Matthew 22:37

b. Others more than self: Matthew 22:39

⁵ J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishing; 1993), 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 184.