

# Fighting Fear and Anxiety

Sovereign Grace Church Ladies Retreat, March 22-23, 2013

Intro: Prayer, Our stories

## 1) The basis for trusting God

- His sovereignty, wisdom and love are woven throughout Scripture.

From *Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges: "It is only in the Scriptures that we find an adequate view of God's relationship to and involvement in our painful circumstances. It is only from the Scriptures, applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that we receive the grace to trust God in adversity.

In the arena of adversity, the Scriptures teach three essential truths about God – truths we must believe if we are to trust Him in adversity. They are: God is completely sovereign. God is infinite in wisdom. God is perfect in love.

Someone has expressed these three truths as they relate to us in this way: 'God in His love always wills what is best for us. In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and in His sovereignty He has the power to bring it about.'

- God's sovereignty and power
  - *Psalms 121:3-4 He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*
  - *Psalms 18:30 This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.*
  - "God is in control; he is sovereign. He does whatever pleases him and determines whether we can do what we have planned. This is the essence of God's sovereignty; His absolute power over the action of all his creatures. No creature, person or empire can either thwart his will, or act outside the bounds of his will." –Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God*
- God's love and Fatherly care
  - *1 John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*
  - *Isaiah 41:13 For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not, I am the one who helps you."*
- God's wisdom
  - *Romans 11:33-34 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"*
  - "God in his infinite wisdom knows exactly what adversity we need to grow more and

more into the likeness of His son." –Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God*

- Are you able to see in your own life that it is God's wisdom that allows suffering into our lives, in order that we might be conformed to the image of his Son? Have you experienced the wisdom of God through an experience in suffering?

## 2) Thinking Biblically about your anxiety

- Luke 12:22-23, 32 And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing... Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"
  - From *When I Am Afraid* by Ed Welch:  
"Do not be afraid! Would you believe that this is the most frequent command in the Bible? More than three hundred times God commands his people to not be afraid.

There are two ways to hear these commands. One is 'Stop it right now! Don't be afraid!' In this case fear and worry would be just plain wrong. It would violate God's direct command. When afraid or anxious you would confess to the Lord that it is sin – and then confess it again and again. But here is another way to hear this command.

Have you ever heard a parent say to a child, 'Be careful'? Technically, it is a command, yet no child would take it that way. The parent is not saying, 'Be careful or you will be in trouble,' but 'I love you, and my desire is for you to be safe.'

Here is what Jesus says to you: 'Do not be afraid little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom' (Luke 12:32). This is not an edict from the King. The term 'little flock' gives you a window into God's heart. This is both a plea and an encouraging word from the Father, who knows and loves you. It is exactly what you need because when you are afraid you desperately need someone bigger than yourself in whom you can trust."

- How do you view the command "Do not be anxious"? Is it helpful for you to view your anxiety as purely sin or more as a reminder to put your trust in God (or a combination of both)?
- Exodus 16 "Bread from Heaven"
  - Remember the Israelites wandering in the desert? God provided them manna one day at a time.
  - "Can you understand why you worry when you think about tomorrow? You worry because you don't have what you need yet. If you imagine tomorrow's misery without tomorrow's manna, of course you are going to worry. Tomorrow's manna isn't on the ground yet. You have manna for today only. In his great wisdom, God doesn't give you

tomorrow's manna today. Otherwise you would forget him and trust in yourself"

-Ed Welch, *When I Am Afraid*

- "There is no grace for your imagination" –Elisabeth Elliot
- Are there times you expect God's grace now for future situations that may or may not actually occur?

### 3) Filtering your thoughts through God's Word

- See chart at end of packet
- Think of a recent circumstance or issue that has been a source of anxiety in your life. How could you use Philippians 4:8-9 to help you think more Biblically?

### 4) The "Putting On": Habits to protect you from anxiety

- *Philippians 4:4-7 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

What should we do instead of worrying?

- Pray

"We shouldn't be stuffing our emotions, or bowing to them. We shouldn't be denying them or venting them; we should be praying them. And I don't mean by praying them that you put them into a nicely manicured little theologically correct confessional prayer. But you pour them out into the presence of God, and you process them there." –Tim Keller (sermon *Praying Our Fears*)

"How I don't fold my hands in prayer...[but] weld them into tight fists of control....Worry is the facade of taking action when prayer really is. . . . What if I opened the clenched hands wide to receive all that is? A life that receives God in *this* moment?" –Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts*

- Do you pray about your fears and anxiety, or do you plan ways to fix the situations that cause you anxiety instead? If you need to make a decision and you are anxious about it, do you continually make pros-and cons-lists in your head about your options? Do you remember to stop and pray? How would praying change how you make decisions, either big or small?
- When we let our requests be made known to God, God will give us peace that comes from giving him our burdens our concerns. The peace comes from

transferring our burdens from ourselves onto Him. Can you give an example in your life when you experienced the peace of God after transferring your burdens and concerns to God and off of yourself?

- Give thanks: Having eyes to see God's kindness and faithfulness around you, protects you from anxiety because you become *more* aware of how He is constantly blessing you and providing for you, and *less* aware of how things might “fall apart”.
  - “Thanks is what builds trust. How do you count on life when the hopes don't add up? The hopes don't have to add up. The blessings do. Count blessings and discover Who can be counted on. This living a lifestyle of intentional gratitude became an unintentional test in the trustworthiness of God—and in counting blessings I stumbled upon the way out of fear.” –Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts*
  - How would intentionally counting God's gifts to you help you to trust God more?
- *Matthew 6:23-34*

*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

*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. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

- It's easy to be tempted to worry about things we value and treasure too much and begin to serve as a master, even if they are good things like health and family. What are some things you value so much that you are fearful and anxious of losing or not attaining? Or, another way of putting it: Look at the “smoke” in your life (the things

that cause you anxiety). Does it reveal the “fire” of what's become too important to you?

- What would it look like for you to stop serving this “god”? What could you “put on” to replace this area of sin and serve the true and living God?

Selfishness v. Serving or reaching out to others

- *Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*
  - Dwell on and preach the gospel to yourself. Gratefulness to Christ for what he's done is the anchor to our soul when the 'hopes' of our life don't add up.
  - “Yes in Christ! To the Enfleshed Yes who said yes to this moment and yes to last year's illness and yes to the cracks of my childhood and yes to the nail and yes to my name in the Book of Life, hear me say YES! Not, “I’m worried”. Not, “I’m stressed out.” Not “I’m anxious.” Not, “I’m too afraid.” Hear me say thank you. Hear me say YES. Watch me live a life of yes. To all that was and is and is to come. The power of sin and death and fear-sent-from-the-Enemy are forever ended because we can trust in the bridge even if it’s caving, in God even when its black, in manna-nourishment even when we don’t know what it is. The God whom we thank for fulfilling the promises of the past will fulfill His promises again. In Christ, the answer to the questions of every moment is always Yes.” -Ann Voskamp, 1000 Gifts

## 5) Living in our fallen world

- *Romans 8:20-24*

*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.*

  - This brokenness includes our physical bodies and our mental processes. Hormonal changes like pregnancy, PMS and menopause can all leave us subject to physical and mental struggles such as anxiety and depression. Difficult and traumatic experiences in our past can also affect our feeling and thinking. While none of this is an excuse for sin, it is helpful to realize that sometimes you may struggle more with anxiety simply because of your circumstances. It is also a reminder to have grace for others in their struggles, because their circumstances may be much harder than our own.
  - Are you experiencing any of these circumstances in your life that need to be considered as you fight anxiety?
- Gifts and strengths turned upside down

- Our life is defined both by the fall of man, as well as our identity as God's creation and His image-bearers. So, sometimes our God-given strengths and gifts can become areas of weakness instead. Those who struggle with anxiety often have similar gifts and strengths that can allow us to be more susceptible to fear and anxiety.
- What are some of your God-given strengths/gifts that can actually also at times tempt you to anxiety? Let's thank God for the gifts and strengths he has given us (we are fearfully and wonderfully made- Psalm 139:13), but also be wise to discern how those gifts can go awry.
- *2 Corinthians 12:7-9 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*
  - For some of us, anxiety can be a long (even lifelong) struggle. We might wonder "Why can't I change?", "Why is this still so hard for me?". God's grace is sufficient for our weakness. When we are weak is when we are strong, because we are resting in Christ and not in our own abilities.
  - Continuing to fight and refusing to give up allows you to know God in a new way. You are more and more familiar with his truths. They are on the tip of your tongue and heart. You can become an encouragement to others, because you understand. And you see God's faithfulness in keeping you and teaching you. You'll have scripture for others, know how to pray for them, and let them know they are not alone.

## Resources:

*Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges

*Running Scared, When I Am Afraid* (workbook) by Ed Welch

*One Thousand Gifts* by Ann Voskamp

*A Sweet and Bitter Providence* by John Piper

"Praying our Fears", sermon by Tim Keller (<http://www.redeemer.com/care/coping/sermons.html>)

Handout of tips and counseling referrals from a Christian counseling intern in our church (email [lstrite@gmail.com](mailto:lstrite@gmail.com) for a copy)

# Filtering Your Thoughts Through God's Word

Philippians 4:8-9 Finally, brothers, whatever is **true**, whatever is **noble**, whatever is **right**, whatever is **pure**, whatever is **lovely**, whatever is **admirable**—if anything is **excellent** or **praiseworthy**—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

	Ask yourself....	Because....
<b>True</b>	Is what I'm thinking true about God, particularly His fatherly care for me? Are my thoughts mere speculation or reality?	Many things in this world are deceptive and illusory, promising what they can never perform, offering specious peace and happiness which they can never supply. A man should always set his thoughts on the things which will not let him down.
<b>Noble</b>	Do my thoughts honor God? Do they reflect the knowledge that He is wise, loving and powerful?	There are things in this world which are flippant and cheap and attractive to the light-minded; but it is on the things which are serious and dignified that the Christian will set his mind.
<b>Right</b>	Are my thoughts holy, righteous, or just? Are they the kind the Lord himself would think?	There are those who set their minds on pleasure, comfort and easy ways. The Christian's thoughts are on duty to man and duty to God.
<b>Pure</b>	Do my thoughts cast doubt on God's goodness or the truth of His promises? Do they elevate my own importance or desire?	This world is full of things which are sordid and shabby and soiled and smutty. Many a man gets his mind into such a state and it soils everything of which it thinks. The Christian's mind is set on things which are pure; his thoughts are so clean that they can stand even the scrutiny of God.
<b>Lovely</b>	Do my thoughts flow from a heart filled with tenderness and affection for the Lord?	The mind of the Christian is set on the lovely things—kindness, sympathy, forbearance—so he is a winsome person, whom to see is to love.
<b>Admirable</b>	Are my thoughts grounded in faith? Do they exalt God's reputation?	There are far too many ugly and false words in this world. On the lips and mind of the Christian there should be only words which are fit for God to hear.
<b>Excellent</b>	Do my thoughts cause me to be more fearful, or do they fill my heart with courage and strong commitment to virtuous living?	The world has its impurities and its degradations but it has also its nobilities and its chivalries, and it is of the high things that the Christian must think.
<b>Praiseworthy</b>	Would the Lord commend my thoughts? Would they elevate his name or bring Him glory?	The Christian will live in such a way that he will neither conceitedly desire nor foolishly despise the praise of men.

My thoughts shape my feelings, attitudes, words and actions.

"The human mind will always set itself on something and Paul wished to be quite sure that the Philippians would set their minds on the right things. This is something of the utmost importance because... if a man thinks of something often enough, he will come to the stage when he cannot stop thinking about it. His thoughts will be quite literally in a groove out of which he cannot jerk them. It is, therefore, of the first importance that a man would set his thoughts upon the fine things and here Paul makes a list of them." p79 Barclay

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.
Colossians 3:2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.
Colossians 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Chart adapted from: *Overcoming Fear, Worry and Anxiety* (Elyse Fitzpatrick), *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (William Barclay)