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Jesus' Answer to Overcoming Anxiety

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Jesus' Answer to Overcoming Anxiety Dr. George Crabb Thu, 02/01/2024 - 02:00 A Biblical Treatment for the Anxious Mind All of us desire to live with greater faith in God. We want to "trust in Him"—not just as a mantra, but as a way of life. Yet, for many believers, crippling anxiety has become their norm. Over and over, anxious worries play at their minds, stuck on an unwelcome repeat. Where do we turn when anxiety takes hold? And how can those of us who serve as biblical counselors guide anxious Christians to a renewed trust in the Lord? There are many passages throughout God's Word that redirect our thoughts from worry to trust, from fear to faith. But perhaps my favorite passage to turn to and to walk others through is Matthew 6:25–33. In fact, I would encourage you to take a moment to read this passage before reading the rest of this article. One encouraging observation from this passage is that the very fact Jesus included this topic in His "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 5–7 tells us that worry and anxiety are common struggles and ones that God cares to help us overcome. Three Gentle Reminders Jesus begins with statements and rhetorical questions that point to the futility of anxiety. Read through the passage, and then notice these points He makes: Anxiety is senseless. Anxiety is a lot of work for no positive return. We expend an enormous amount of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energy when we allow anxiety into our lives with no benefit gained. Anxiety drains and immobilizes us. It doesn't empower or motivate us. Anxiety is sinful. According to Jesus in Matthew 6:30 anxiety is a fruit of unbelief. It is a lack of faith, and as such, it dishonors and displeases God. Anxiety envisions circumstances which may never occur while forgetting the realities of God's nature which has never changed. God's provisions are powerful and plentiful. God deserves more than little faith; He deserves our complete trust. Anxiety is slanderous. A continually anxious Christian is a poor witness to a watching world. It indicates that God cannot or will not provide for our needs. In reality, God will always provide for our needs. In fact, remembering His plentiful faithfulness is part of the answer to overcoming anxiety. Three Needful Actions? Thankfully, Jesus didn't only point out the shortfalls of worry; He also prescribed a treatment for the anxious mind. Notice these three parts to the prescription: Renew your mind. Throughout this entire passage, Jesus renews our thinking as He puts our anxious thoughts into a perspective of the faithfulness of God. (Philippians 4:4–8, another passage that is so helpful in fighting anxiety, follows a similar pattern.) A stable, non-anxious mind thinks biblically; it rests upon the sure foundation of God's Word. On the other hand, an anxious mind dwells on things that are not God-centered or Christ-exalting. We must move toward a mind that is settled upon the truth found in God's Word. Isaiah 26:3 makes a similar point: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee." As we focus our mind on God, He gives us peace. Reevaluate your priorities. Jesus began with the admonition, "Take no thought for [all of the things you tend to worry about]." And then He pointed His listeners instead to consider the "fowls of the air" and the "lilies of the field." And why are we to consider these things? Because God meets all their needs without their help worrying. Jesus then poses the question, "Are ye not much better than they?" Our Savior's argument is simple: anxiety arises when we place a high value on the wrong things. This is further seen as the passage closes with a verse many of us know but sometimes forget its context: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Jesus is instructing us not to overvalue the temporal and undervalue the eternal. The disciples were anxious about food and clothing instead of about their lives and walk with God. They needed a fresh understanding of what God deems significant which is a deep, dynamic, and daily fellowship with Him. When we grasp this truth, it will stop our fussing and fretting. Remember your Heavenly Father. As Christians, we have a relationship with God the Father through the finished work of His Son, Jesus Christ. We are His children, and, as Jesus pointed out earlier in the same sermon, He is "Our Father which art in heaven . . ." (Matthew 6:9). Remembering the relationship we have with our Heavenly Father builds our faith. "And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee" (Psalm 9:10). As we focus on God's lovingkindness and faithfulness, we realize we have no need to be anxious. Our Heavenly Father knows what we need, and He has the ability to supply it (Philippians 4:19). More grace is what we all want and need, and God will give us the perfect amount of grace at the perfect time (2 Corinthians 12:9). In light of this, we can live moment by moment without anxiety, because the same Father who takes care of all creation knows what we need before we are even conscious of it. Our Heavenly Father will breathe out grace upon us, perfectly proportioned to cover our needs as we prioritize Him in our lives and passionately pursue fellowship with Him. Careful or Considering? Perhaps because of the commonness of anxiety or perhaps because of the stranglehold it so easily develops on our minds, many Christians write anxiety off as something to simply be endured. Yet, the Bible is clear that we are to "Be careful for nothing . . ." (Philippians 4:6). The word careful means "to be full of care." It's the perfect word for what Jesus warned against in Matthew 6. There are no ifs or buts in this command. Anxiety is not a personality trait; it is a lack of trust in God. It amounts to a kind of functional atheism—thinking and living as if God does not exist, or at least as if He is not concerned with my needs. The way to combat this anxious, full-of-care tendency so many of us fight is to instead consider what is true. Consider God's care for the birds and the lilies and His love for you. And then, with these realities in mind, follow the instruction of Philippians 4:6 to take every one of your cares to Christ in prayer: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." When you find yourself full of care, remember instead to consider your Father's faithfulness and His care for you. Category Christian Living Tags Biblical Counseling Stress Worry