

## The Heart of Anxiety

Matthew 6:25-34

- A. We live in an age of anxiety.
  - a. What does this statement mean?
  - b. How does living in an age of anxiety impact you personally?
  - c. We can sometimes treat the Bible like an encyclopedia of practical wisdom or as a medication that we prescribe for spiritual problems.
    - i. Discuss how you would use an encyclopedia to research a topic. Give examples of how we might use the Bible this way. What is the danger of doing this?
    - ii. How might we treat the Bible as a medication to be prescribed for spiritual illnesses? Give examples.
  - d. How does this contrast with finding comfort in God's word as a *comprehensive message* of God's redemption?
    - i. What does 2 Cor. 1:3-4 say about God's provision for our affliction?
    - ii. What does Psalm 119:49-50 and 52 say about comfort in affliction?
    - iii. Why should this encourage us to read, study, and meditate on the whole of God's word?
  - e. Read Psalm 119:51. The world will scoff at us when our hope and comfort is God's word.
    - i. What might the world's derision or mockery look like?
    - ii. How are we tempted to respond?
    - iii. What *should* our response be according to this verse?
  - f. Read Colossians 2:8 and Romans 12:2. We are all susceptible to conformity to this world.
    - i. How will you know that you are conforming to the world?



ii. What should your response be when you find yourself being tempted to conform to the doctrines of this world?

iii. What might make it difficult for you to see your conformity and to respond rightly?

B. What is Anxiety?

a. Definitions:

*Anxiety is a state of apprehension, uncertainty, and fear resulting from the anticipation of a realistic or fantasized threatening event or situation. (Webster's Dictionary)*

*Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure. (American Psychological Association)*

b. What is the difference between "being anxious" and "worrying"? [See note below.]

c. Over time, how might people respond if they believe that the **feeling** of anxiety is always sinful?

**Important Note:**

In every case in which the translations "be anxious" or "be worried" are used (e.g. Matthew 6:25-34; 10:19; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11-26; Philippians 4:6, etc.) the word being translated is an *active verb* and not an *adjective* as these translations suggest. In other words, these passages speak of something we **do** and not of something we **are** or **feel**. This is very important because the **feeling** of anxiety can be caused by things that are *not* sinful (e.g. medical conditions, medication, etc.).

Translating these verbs as adjectives (especially in our cultural context) results in what seem to be unequivocal commands to stop **feeling** anxious. For example, "Be (feel) anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer..." in Phil. 4:6 seems to say that nothing should cause us to **feel** anxious and the practice of thankful prayer should change all our anxious **feelings** into **feelings** of peace. But this is not what is being said. Translating with an active verb instead of with an adjective fixes this dilemma. "Do not **worry** about anything, but in everything by prayer..." becomes an exhortation not to **do** one thing but to **do** another, i.e. don't worry, pray.

As we will see, using an active verb translation does *not* suggest that we are *never* responsible for our feelings or that we cannot be commanded to change the way we feel. The Bible *does* command us to take responsibility for our emotional responses and gives us instruction as to how we can learn to control them. In fact, understanding the active verbs in the above passages is key to understanding how we can learn to control the unbridled feeling of anxiety. Lord willing, this will become more clear as we continue to work through these issues together.



C. Causes of anxiety:

- a. The following were given as causes for anxiety according to our culture. Discuss ways in which the Bible might agree and disagree with these causes.
  - i. Real threats to our wellbeing (i.e. real dangers, cf. Matt. 14:30).
  - ii. Medical conditions (e.g. sickness, medications, etc., cf. 1 Kings 17).
  - iii. Mental health disorders (cf. Psalm 94:19).
- b. How might the culture's beliefs about anxiety affect our understanding of anxiety?
- c. How might our experiences influence our understanding? Why is it dangerous to let our experiences or feelings take the lead on issues like this?

Practical Applications:

- How can *you* counsel *yourself* the next time you are tempted to worry (e.g. Ps. 119:52)?
- What might be an appropriate way to counsel someone else you know struggling with anxiety?
- Reread Matt. 6:25-34. What are some practical ways this text can help us fight feelings of anxiety?