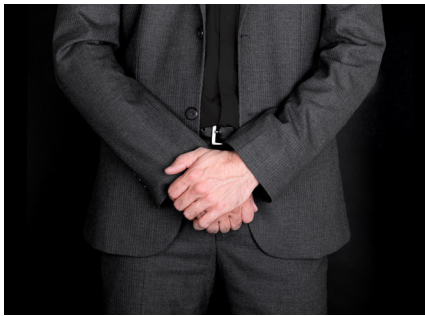


The Reality of Anxiety

By Marco Scouvert



Have you read, listened to, or watched the news recently? It is full of bad reports concerning war, diseases, natural disasters, crime, political corruption and turmoil, economic inflation, unemployment and poverty. Such is life under the sun in a fallen world where sin and its consequences are known and felt. As followers of Jesus we are not immune to the same uncertainties of life that can lead others into ungodly forms or levels of anxiety.

Distinguishing between righteous concern and sinful anxiety

Godly concern is the appropriate fruit of love that desires the best for another person. Unmarried Christians have a strong interest about serving the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 7:32, 35). Believers have an affectionate concern about the well-being of other members in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:25). And spiritual leaders have an appropriate attentiveness concerning the spiritual safety of Christians under their care (2 Corinthians 11:28; Philippians 2:20).

The Greek word for “anxious” literally means to be divided into parts, or to be tugged in different directions by concerns. When used figuratively and in a negative sense, this excessive fretting pulls our minds and our lives away from a united focus and devotion to the most important things. This is the agitation that Jesus gently admonished Martha about when she was distracted from paying singular attention to Jesus and his teaching (Luke 10:38-42). And this is the worry that Jesus warned might choke out the gospel from producing fruit in a person’s life (Mark 4:18-19).

How can we know when we’ve crossed the line from appropriate concern to sinful worry? Here are five scenarios that might indicate our good concern has become ungodly anxiety.

When we become *prayerless*. When we fret over something in our mind and tell others about it, yet neglect to take it to the Lord, we might have sinful worry (1 Peter 5:7).

When we become *thankless*. When we are so worried about something that we are not able to thank God for it (Philippians 4:6), we might have unrighteous anxiety.

When we become *restless* or *sleepless*. When we are so anxious about something that it robs us of our sleep by getting up too early, staying up late, or tossing through the night (Psalm 127:2) we might have inordinate trouble.

When we become *irritable*. When we lack peace and calmness with daily circumstances, or are easily angry and impatient with people, we might have unholy concern.

When we become *consumed*. When we cannot stop thinking about something and it invades our minds constantly, even when we’re trying to focus upon other thoughts, or when we are putting in too much time and effort concerning something, we might have ungodly anxiety.

Seven helps to overcome sinful anxiety

1. *Comfort yourself with God’s truth.* Psalm 94:19, “When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.”
2. *Trust in Yahweh to help you.* Jeremiah 17:7-8, “Blessed is the man who trusts in Yahweh, whose trust is Yahweh. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.”
3. *Believe that God is committed to provide for you.* Matthew 6:26, 28-30, “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 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?”
4. *Remember that God knows what you need.* Matthew 6:7-8, “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask.”
5. *Know that anxiety doesn’t accomplish anything good.* Luke 12:25-26, “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?”
6. *Give thanks to God.* Philippians 4:6-7, “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.”
7. *Humbly bring your cares to God.* 1 Peter 5:6-7, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”

It may be wise for those of us who too often worry, to post these helps for overcoming anxiety on our refrigerator or bathroom mirror, or to keep them in our Bibles for review. This is a battle we must win.