

Anxiety and Its Antidote

Introduction

The Text

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” ¹⁴ But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵ And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” ¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

²² 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. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, 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. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

³² “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Luke 12:13–34)

The Ubiquity of Anxiety

- A. We read from [vv. 13-34](#) here at the beginning, because I think the whole of this text will help us interpret the part. But our focus in particular for this morning will be [vv. 22-31](#). You’ll recall last week we gave ourselves to that devastating parable in [vv. 13-21](#), and, Lord willing, next week we shall draw this discussion to a close by investigating [vv. 32-34](#) more closely.
- B. But today we set our sights on those verses in between. And I daresay they are some of the sweetest, perhaps even some of the most recognizable, of Jesus’ words in all His teaching. The subject in view here is anxiety.
 1. And I suppose the reason we find these words particularly sweet and memorable, if I might be so bold, is because we all deal with anxiety in one way or another. Sure, there are some

more in the throes of it than others—some more severe along the spectrum we could say—but we all are closer friends with anxiety than we would ever wish or be willing to admit.

- a. I for one can attest to moments, even recently, where it feels as if I'm choking on air, as if a pair of hands has me gripped by the neck. I struggle to breathe. And when I stop and consider why, the clear conclusion is that I'm anxious. There are things I feel I must do that I'm not sure I can do, people's opinions I'm afraid of, situations I don't know how to face, and so forth. The cumulative effect of such things is a burden too much for me to bear.
- C. I wonder if you've ever experienced something similar? My sense is that you probably have. At least the statistics would seem to indicate as much: "(According to the National Institute of Mental Health) anxiety is the most common mental-health disorder in the United States, affecting nearly one-third of both adolescents and adults" (NYT).
1. And the statistic here is referring to those cases of anxiety serious enough to be called "disorders". This does not include the everyday run-of-the-mill anxiety experienced, I would argue, by every single one of us.
 - a. So, with as much one third of Americans in the "disorder" range of things, we should get some sense of the ubiquity of the issue at hand.
- D. In [Pro 12:25](#), the author states that: "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad." It is certainly my hope to bring such a "good word" to us this morning. As we make our way through the text, I'm going to organize my thoughts under two headings: (1) Anxiety's Cause; and (2) Anxiety's Cure.

(1) Anxiety's Cause

- A. Before any physician can ever properly address a disease of any sort, he needs to gain some sense of the underlying cause. The symptoms are one thing, but the source of those symptoms, that is what you are really after. Getting at that is the only real way to attack the problem effectively.

Avarice

- A. So we must look at the cause of our anxiety, and I do think we shall probably be a bit surprised at what we find. We tend to think that those struggling with anxiety are something akin to victims, that something is being done to them. That is why, with anxiety, you feel helpless, you feel weak, you feel powerless. It is a pitiable thing and it draws our compassion, and, in many ways it should.
1. But Jesus is making it plain here (and I shall soon show you how): anxiety follows on the tail of avarice. Worry inevitably accompanies greed. In other words: though anxiety may, on the surface of it, seem innocent and pitiable, there is something sinister, even sinful, to it.
- B. This is why I read the full breadth of those verses as I did. I wanted you to see the connection Jesus makes for His disciples and us here, between [vv. 13-21](#) and [vv. 22ff](#).

1. The former, undoubtedly is focused on avarice, on greed, on the insatiable thirst for stuff. That's the problem with the guy who interrupts Jesus asking for His help in getting his brother to divide the inheritance with him. That's the point of the parable Jesus tells about the guy building bigger barns with concern only for himself. "[R]elax, eat, drink, be merry" (v. 19). "I've got my security, my pleasure, my identity." And then in v. 20 it all just comes crashing down.
- C. But, then, surprisingly perhaps, in v. 22, Jesus turns to His disciples and says: "Therefore [In light of all that I've just said about avarice] I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on." Anxiety follows on the tail of avarice. Worry inevitably accompanies greed.
1. Those given to materialism will find themselves horribly anxious. If you have not, you are anxious to get. If you have, you are anxious to keep. Either way, you are fighting a losing battle against moth, rust, thief, and time, and deep down you know it.
- D. If you really stop and investigate your anxious heart I have no doubt you will find something of the same. You want, and you are afraid you won't get. You have a plan, and you are afraid God's not going to take orders from you, that things are going to go differently, maybe even painfully. We are anxious people because we are greedy people. We want to establish our own security, pleasure, identity for ourselves rather than find it in Him.

Pride

- A. But there is one step behind even this that we can go. Indeed, we can trace our anxiety back through greed all the way to what CS Lewis refers to as the "mother of all sins": namely, pride.
1. CJ Mahaney, in his little book *Humility*, writes this: "Where there's worry, where there's anxiousness, pride is at the root of it. When I am experiencing anxiety, the root issue is that I'm trying to be self-sufficient. I'm acting independent of God (p. 75).
- B. Anxiety is, in a sense then, going dark to God. It's living as if God isn't here—as if what He's said won't come true for you, as if what He's doing won't apply to you. To put it in its most pointed form: Your anxiety says, in essence: "God cannot be trusted to come through here. It's up to me!" That's why Jesus comes down in v. 28 and says: "O you of little faith."
1. When I am in the throes of anxiety, I am getting bigger and God is getting smaller. What this means, then, is that, in those moments, when I'm finding it hard to breathe or whatever, the hands around my neck . . . are actually my own! Pride, greed, anxiety.
- C. So here then is the cause, we might say. Now, what are we to do with that?!

(2) Anxiety's Cure

- A. Well, it seems the Good Physician here is attempting to take us through a course of treatment, as it were, to help us deal with this kind of anxiety. In the verses that follow, He gives us four things to consider, and with each consideration we are meant to draw particular conclusions.

1. As we progress with Him through these considerations and conclusions, it seems to me, we are moved step by step closer towards the ultimate goal: namely, that we would be freed from excessive concern for the things of this world and finally able to concern ourselves with the things of God.

(1) Consider Life: It Is More (v. 23)

- A. The first thing Jesus calls us to consider is life itself. The conclusion He wants us to come to is that life is more than the stuff we typically get all worked up about. Read back from v. 22 for context: “²² 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.’²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.”
- B. Now, to be clear, Jesus is not saying here that food and clothing are not important (indeed, He knows they are essential to human life [cf. v. 30]). Rather, He is saying that such things are not worthy of our anxiety. They are not worthy of our excessive care and concern. Yes we need them to live, but life is about so much more.
 1. To spend our lives anxiously trying to accumulate and secure stuff—whatever that stuff may be, is to miss the point of it all.
- C. Let me illustrate this for you. So Megan’s birthday was back in September and we’d kind of gone back and forth on what I should get her as a gift. She loves cooking and we finally decided we were going to get a new toaster oven. Our last one was pretty much dead. Thanksgiving was coming up and we’ve got to get this thing. So we did our research, we pulled out our old gift cards, coupons, and things, and we went down to Bed, Bath, and Beyond and we went all out. I mean, this thing is like the Lexus of toaster ovens. It can bake your food, toast your food, broil your food, dehydrate your food, airfry your food. (I don’t even know what airfry is, but it does it.)
 1. So we get this thing out of its box, we’re setting it in its place, making last adjustments, and as we step back and take in the glory of this shiny new appliance, we suddenly realize . . . the last thing we want to do is cook with it. I don’t want crumbs in this thing. I don’t want cheese from your pizza to spill over and get grease on the bottom. I don’t want your filthy fingers smearing the glass on the front. I don’t want this shiny, new toaster oven to go the way of our last toaster oven. The last thing we want to do is cook with this!
 - a. But don’t you see, if we were to get so worked up, so anxious about keeping it clean that we refused to cook with it, we would miss the whole point of it. It was designed to cook. It was designed to get messy in the making of meals so that we could fellowship around the table with family and friends and have a great evening. That’s the point.
- D. And we can make the same sort of mistakes with our stuff. We get anxious about food, clothing, shelter, money, and whatever else. We try to gather them in for ourselves, store them up in our barns, keep them and us safe. But really these things were meant to be the context whereby we pursue higher realities. We use our food, clothing, shelter, money in love for God and others.

1. Like, with my kids around the table, I often pray before our meals something like this: “God thank you for this evidence of your grace and care. We don’t deserve it. Thank you that we get to share in this provision together. May the energy this food supplies us with be spent in service of You and others in Your name.”

a. Don’t you see? There’s more to your food than just food. It’s an opportunity to worship God in gratitude as you enjoy it. It provides context for gathering with family and friends. It fuels us with energy to live for His kingdom. May it never be that a meal becomes simply about me and my belly.

E. Jesus is saying: “Don’t be anxious for such baseline realities. Life is about so much more.”

(2) Consider Death: It Is Inevitable (vv. 25-26)

A. Next, I would direct your attention to vv. 25-26 where Jesus, it seems to me, is trying to get us to consider not just life now, but death: “²⁵ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?”

B. With these words I think Jesus is trying to get at the inevitability of death and how utterly powerless we are to do anything about it.

1. Death is a ruthless, cold, hard fact. No amount of anxiety, worry, labor, or ingenuity can change that. O sure, with our money and our technologies we may be able postpone it. But there is no amount of money and there will never be a technology that can ultimately keep us from it.

C. Now, from a biblical worldview, we, of course, know why this is: the sinfulness of man, and the curse of God on this world because of it: “[S]in came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom 5:12).

D. I was reading an article the other day where the author (not a Christian from what I could tell) was reflecting on the certainty of death and our, oftentimes, stubborn denial of this fact, especially in our culture. He’s talking particularly about how we approach starting families, having kids, and so forth. The article, tellingly, is titled: *Your Real Biological Clock Is You’re Going to Die*. He writes this: “In our social world, in our cultural class, at our point in history, people are brought up to . . . structure their lives as if time were something a person accumulated. One is wary of getting married too soon, of having children too young. Adulthood is a condition to enter cautiously and gradually. . . . The figure of the kidult exists as a warning that you should not move on to the next step until you’re certain you’re ready. . . .

But this idea of certainty is a sham, a distraction, something to turn your attention away from the only truly certain thing, which is that your time will run out. If you intend to have children, but you don’t intend to have them just yet, you are not banking extra years as a person who is still too young to have children. You are subtracting years from the time you will share the world with your children.

All our conversations about choices and priorities and life decisions are held in the shadow of the great constraint. . . . The clock is running, only it’s not a clock: It’s a sandglass. According to the Social Security Administration’s online calculator, an average man born the day I was born can

expect to live 34.9 more years, for a total of 82.0 years. When I first checked it, when drafting this piece, it was 35.4. I thought it would be a lighthearted exercise, but I felt real dread as I was entering the birthdate, and, despite myself, shock when I saw how small the number was.”

1. We like to act like we have all the time in the world, and he’s saying that’s simply not true, and it’s foolish, even harmful.
- E. He goes on to describe in moving language how being a parent of young kids forces us to face this relentless march of time: “Life moves along at an unexceptional, unexamined pace and suddenly it’s the first day of school, and then it’s the first day of school again. The jeans I remember just buying him are up above the ankles. The younger boy kisses me back when I kiss him good night, but by last year the older boy started to twist away from holding hands a few yards before the school door, to dart off ahead. Now he just walks to school on his own. There’s time still for him to circle back for a hug at day’s end. Someday, though, a hug will be the last one.”
1. I suppose I wanted to read that last bit because I feel that with my own kids. Certain complications have made it so that Megan and I won’t be able to have a child again. So, as we’re watching Levi develop and grow, we realize, oftentimes with tears in our eyes, that every milestone he reaches, every new word he learns to speak, every new development of ability and personality, it may very well be our last time celebrating such a thing with a little one. Our time is limited. Death is inevitable.
- F. And so the question Jesus is trying to get us to ponder is: In view of this reality, what are we living for? He’s trying to get us to go the way of [Psa 39:4-7](#): “⁴ O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! ⁵ Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! ⁶ Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather! ⁷ And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.”
1. A brush with death often wakes people up, right? It re-orgs our priorities. In the shadow of death, strangely, we often see more clearly what life is all about—not stuff, but God! “[My hope is in you!](#)”

(3) Consider Creation: God Is Here (vv. 24, 27-28)

- A. Now, such considerations about the inevitability of death could be quite frightening. But as Jesus takes us a step further in our recovery program, as He administers the next round of treatment, we find that God has not left us alone to face such things, but rather He is here with us. And He values us. And He cares for us as men and woman created in His image.
1. We find that the universe didn’t emerge from a mindless and meaningless bang, nor did God create this place and then leave. No! According to Jesus, He created all things and He is right here sustaining it and caring for it. He is concerned for it even down to the smallest and most minute of details.
- B. And we get all of this when, in [vv. 24, 27-28](#), Jesus encourages us to consider creation: “²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! . . . ²⁷ Consider the lilies, 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.²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!

- C. Isn't this just what the anxious person needs?! Think about it. If anxiety is going dark to God and bending inward with self-concern, yourself getting bigger, God getting smaller and vanishing from view—well, what better thing to do then to go outside and open your eyes? Look away from yourself to what God has made, to what God is doing.
 - 1. Creation has a ministry: “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psa 19:1). “[H]is invisible attributes . . . have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Rom 1:20).

- D. I have told you before, I think, that I love to run in the hills behind my house. Now I know people have different reasons for running. Some are trying to get good exercise and get their heartrate up, burn calories, and so forth. Others are interested in things like their time and how many minutes it takes them to run a mile or whatever. All of this is well and good.
 - 1. But I've never been all that interested in such things. For me—sure I like to be healthy and get exercise and things—but the real reason I run is so that I can get outside of my little world and consider creation and the Creator who's sustaining it all! I need to see God. That's why I don't run on the a treadmill or a track. That's why I run in the hills.
 - a. I want to watch how the rain we just got is going to slowly bring the grass and flowers out. I want to watch how the birds are cared for and fed. I want to watch this text come to life and hear my God saying to me: “If I will do this for the fields and the birds, how much more for you whom I have made in My image.”
 - i. Such things bring health not just to my body, but to my soul.

- E. I was convicted by something a friend shared with me the other day from the book *Reset* by David Murray. He writes: “Lots of people call God Creator but live like evolutionists. It's as if life is about the survival of the fittest rather than about living like a dependent creature—trusting our Creator rather than ourselves . . .”
 - 1. And so I bring this to you for your reflection before you move on. Are you living in the world of [Luke 12](#)—a world where God, the Creator is actively concerned for His creation, especially you? Or are you in the world as most of the science books would try to describe it—a world where there is no fairytale of a God caring for you? If you're going to survive, if you're going to make it here, it's on you.
 - a. Step outside. Consider creation. God is here. You don't need to be anxious.

(4) Consider Your Father: You Are Free (vv. 29-31)

- A. And so now we come to the final consideration, and it really brings all of this to a climax. Let me just read to you Jesus' words: “²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be

worried.³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.”

- B. Here I think Jesus is trying to get us to consider, above all else, our Father. If in vv. 24, 27-28 He reminds us that we have a Creator, well here in vv. 29-31 He aims to help us see that the Creator of all things is also our Father. He is intimately related to us, He is relentlessly committed to caring for us. That’s what it means to be a Dad.
- C. Jesus’ logic here turns on v. 30. Why can we finally let go of anxiety and self-concern and instead give ourselves to the things of His kingdom—to love for Him and neighbor? Why do we not need to worry about our own food and drink and clothing and shelter and so forth? Well, it’s because “your Father knows that you need them.”
 - 1. He is actively engaged in your life for your good. He knows what you need even more than you do. What if you actually believed this? What would happen to your anxieties?

Conclusion

- A. In all of these things, we must not miss that Jesus Himself stands before us as the surest sign and seal of the Father’s provision.
 - 1. If we want to talk about God providing us food . . . Jesus is it: “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger” (John 6:35).
 - 2. If we want to talk about God providing us drink . . . Jesus is it: “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:38).
 - 3. If we want to talk about God providing us clothes and shelter . . . Jesus is it: “[A]s many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). He is our covering and in Him we are counted righteous before God.
 - 4. If we want to talk about the fear of death . . . well, Jesus has defeated it (1 Cor 15:57).
 - 5. If we want to talk about adding hours to the span of our lives . . . well, knowing Jesus is eternal life (John 17:3).
- B. God takes anything we could be anxious about at a more superficial level and supplies it to us in Jesus at a more lasting, substantial level. This is not to say He will not provide for us literal food and drink and clothing. It is to say that He will provide for us, and already has provided for us, so much more.
 - 1. Brothers and sisters look at me. If you are in Christ this morning, God is your Father, and you are free!