

Coach House Church

BEACONS

W O R R I E D ?

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We hear a lot in the media these days about how to look after our mental health. Worries are seemingly very deeply embedded in our lives. We spend a lot of time worrying about what to eat, what to buy, who to see, how to deal with certain situations. Sometimes these worries get worse and become anxieties. Anxieties can, if not controlled, take over our lives. Worries and anxieties have another close relative, fear. What I want to look at today is this. What is the relationship between these feelings and what can we do when they are out of balance? The NHS has plenty of ways of treating these problems but as Christians should we approach the problem differently?

Lets start by looking at fear. Fear is described in the dictionary as “apprehension of danger or pain”. Clearly fear is not of itself a bad thing. Fear is part of the way God made us. It is a mechanism for protecting us. It's job is to keep us safe. For example, as a child I got a finger trapped in a door, I was fortunate that it wasn't broken but ever since I have a fear when my hands are near a door. In this case the fear is working correctly, doing what it should, in drawing the risk to the front of my mind, in that situation. It is there to protect me from the possibility of receiving a painful, possibly debilitating, injury.

Fear is also described in the dictionary as “piety towards God” The bible says “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”. So clearly in this case fear is actually very good. It is important that we bear this in mind. We must not lose sight of the fact that fear is God given and is for our benefit.

So what about worries? Well worries are less important in today's study but I am making brief mention of them so that we can see the differences. Worry is described in the dictionary as "the state of being anxious and troubled over actual or potential problems". So a worry is something that we spend time thinking about. Worries are often entirely rational and tend to occur when we can only see part of a situation. Right now it is understandable if we are worried about going to the shops. The uncertainty is this; has someone with Coronavirus been in the shop before me? If you had complete visibility of the situation and knew that the area was safe you would not need to worry, if, conversely, you found out that someone with the virus had just been in you could simply avoid the area. Jesus made this observation about worry; "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear"... "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" In this passage Jesus is not saying that worry itself is sinful, rather, that allowing it to divert your attention away from God is the sin.

So what can I do if I have realised that I am in this situation? Well firstly you can bring it to God in prayer, then also consider the points made about Anxiety which we are now moving on to. Jesus closed his comments about worry by saying this "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own"

Moving on now to anxiety. Firstly we need to understand the difference between Anxiety and Fear. Max Lucado in his book anxious for nothing puts it like this "Anxiety and Fear are cousins but not twins. Fear sees a threat, anxiety imagines one"

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The dictionary describes anxiety as "a state of chronic apprehension" In simple terms fears that were contained to specific situations have become more generalised. In my example about the door, it is fear I experience if I am in close proximity to a door, but if I start worrying about it when I am nowhere near a door then it has become anxiety. A second feature of anxiety is the response. If you have symptoms such as feeling faint, sweating, increased heart rate or a desire to run away then fear has tipped over into anxiety. For clarity I should point out that there are two types of anxiety. Regular

anxiety normally has a clear reason for being there. Something specific has happened to set it off. You know what it is and thankfully when things are resolved or over time the anxiety diminishes. The other type is clinical anxiety. This tends to have no clear source and can be much worse and long lasting than regular anxiety. As a sufferer of clinical anxiety I can attest to just how hard it is to manage this illness. Whichever form of anxiety you have the solutions found in the bible are much the same. The most often quoted verses are found in Paul's letter to the Phillipians. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" Likewise Peter wrote in his first letter "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you"

It sounds so simple doesn't it? If only it was that easy!

First of all it helps if we have a right relationship with God. God is not there to put pick up the pieces when we mess up, to give us stuff when we want it, or to be there when we want him. He is not our guardian angel or our servant. He is Almighty God. He is pure and holy and righteous and perfect in ways we cannot even imagine. It is we who need to seek His will. The agenda is his to set, not ours. Getting that right will make a real difference in how we deal with our problems and illnesses. Despite his holiness and perfection God still invites us to cast all our anxieties on him. God loved us so much that he sent his one and only Son, Jesus, to take these burdens off us. Even though it would cost him death on the cross he willingly bore the burden that was rightfully ours. We can, if we want, choose to carry that burden ourselves, or we can, if we want, choose to ask Jesus to carry the burden for us. Look more closely at Paul's advice. "By prayer and petition" We all know what prayer is, that is just talking to and listening to God.

By the way, better to spend more time listening than talking. But what about petition? This may be something that you have never come across before so what is different about a petition from a normal prayer? Well a petition tends to be a written statement of what you want, petitions tend to be signed by many people, all affirming that they agree with the statement made, and petitions tend to take time to put together. So here is the first step on our road to recovery from whatever fears, worries or anxieties has so beset us. As you bring your problem before God, write it down, share it with

others, and be disciplined about how and when you approach God with your need. Daily is certainly good in this respect but in any case you must apply discipline. Note also that the correct way to approach God is with thanksgiving. Think about the things in your life that you are grateful for, remember that all good things come from God and therefore give him the thanks that he is due. Lastly remember Gods promise at the end of that scripture. That He will “guard our hearts and minds” and “give us his peace”. Whatever happens it is Gods desire that we would, one day, be with him in eternity, where we will be free from all earthly impediments. This is why he wants to keep us close, guarding our hearts and minds, he wants us to finish the race no matter what. There is clearly a lot more that we could say on this subject if time permitted but for now we just need to recognise that the truth is that by having that right relationship with God he will always bring us back to the place he wants us to be.

I pray that if you are struggling with fear, worries or anxiety of any type, that God will draw you near, take your burden and bring you His peace.

He will “guard our hearts and minds” and “give us his peace”.



Steve Adshead



Coach House Church

leadership@coachhousechurch.org // 0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn