



Lecture 2: FEAR, WORRY & ANXIETY - Enemies of a Peaceful Heart

We have nothing to fear but fear itself. FDR

Don't you wish that were true? It seems like we live in a world where there is everything to be feared!

- Will I have a job?
- Will my husband abandon me?
- Will I have cancer?
- Am I going to have an accident?
- Will my kids go crazy?
- Will a disease bring tragedy to our family?
- Will terrorists strike again?

In addition, we have the media working diligently to scare us to death.

The truth is that we live in troubled times. Jesus when he was on earth said *In this world you will have tribulation*. But we don't have to live in fear. We have a choice!

I. Learning to deal with fear

A. Understanding fear

Fear is our biological and emotional response to real or perceived danger. One author described fear as *an unpleasant and often strong emotion caused by the anticipation or awareness of danger*.

Panic (not panic attacks) is an intense form of fear: Panic is a sudden fear that dominates or replaces thinking. Panic typically occurs in dangerous situations. You are in a football stadium and an announcement comes over the loudspeaker that there is a bomb and that everyone must exit. When you panic either you freeze or getting out becomes your sole thought. It replaces all reason & wisdom.

B. The value of healthy fear

Healthy fear protects us from dangerous situations and foolish behavior. It is wise to build healthy fear into our children. We should be afraid of bears, snakes, driving while drinking, drug use and STD's. There are consequences to foolish behavior and healthy fear keeps us from doing dumb things. There are things in life of which we should be afraid.

C. The problem of unhealthy fear

Unhealthy fear is when fear takes control and keeps us from moving forward in our lives, or doing the right thing.

- The fear of what someone thinks of you keeps you from confronting them
- The fear of failure keeps you from doing what needs to be done
- The fear of flying keeps you from enjoying a vacation or from going to visit your family
- The fear of how your kids might respond keeps you from disciplining them

Fear can actually bring about the result that we are afraid of. For example: you are afraid that you are losing control of your kids, so in response you try to over control them. What can happen? The kids rebel even more.

Another example: you're afraid that you might have cancer so you avoid going to the doctor. Perhaps you do have cancer, but your delay in checking it out turns what could have been a relatively minor problem into a major problem.

In addition, unhealthy fear can bring physical consequences: Fear heightens our senses, it prepares our body for physical action (fight or flight). Long-term exposure to repeated doses of adrenaline and other stress-related hormones,

however, can wreak havoc on your body -- you could experience more colds and infections, sexual disorders, aches and pains, fatigue or loss of appetite.

Finally, fear can make us self-centered, and cuts us off from having a positive influence on others and that is truly a tragedy because much of the joy in life comes from loving and serving others.

D. Dealing with fear

Throughout the process of dealing with fear, journaling can help you understand and get a grip on your feelings of fear. I'll elaborate on journaling a little later, but understand that every step of the way, taking a few minutes to write down your thoughts can help you understand yourself and your situation a little better.

1. Slow down

One of the problems of fear is that it tends to speed you up. Adrenalin and other powerful agents add energy to your body, your heart rate increases, your blood pressure rises, breathing accelerates. Your body is speeding up to prepare for a fight or to run away.

If you can, in the situation, stop and take a slow breath.

- Admit you are afraid – this may be tougher than you think. Often our fear manifests itself as anger or even apathy (giving up).
- Identify what has triggered your fear. (What am I afraid of?)
- Stop & think for a moment, what would be the best, most productive response to this fear?

2. Determine that fear will not control you

You have identified your fear, now you have a choice. Fear seldom leads us to make wise choices.

The Bible, time and time again, challenges us to be not afraid. It is not saying don't have the emotion of fear, but don't let that emotion control your actions, reactions, attitudes, and words. The fact that the Bible tells us not to fear implies two things:

There are things in this world that can make us afraid.

We have a choice. We don't have to let our fears control us!!

In Joshua 1:1-9 we find an example of fear in the Bible with a man named Joshua. Three times God had to say to him "Be strong and courageous."

Don't let fear reign in your life...move forward.

In your journaling, and in your discussions, it is helpful to write and speak the words, *I will not be afraid!* Say it even when you FEEL fearful.

3. Act with courage

Courage is not the absence of fear it is the willingness to do the right thing in the presence of fear.

One of the great problems of fear is that it can lead us to avoid or procrastinate dealing with the situation that is making us afraid.

Ask yourself the question: If I weren't afraid what would I do? You will probably be closer to identifying the right response.
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Invest some time planning your course of action - it can give you courage to carry out the plan.

Be proactive—In addressing your fears, don't be passive. Allow yourself to be creative. This is where wise friends can really be helpful. When you're afraid, it is hard to focus on creative solutions. Think about the specific action steps you can take that will help resolve the situation or give you confidence in the situation. The very act of taking action can give courage.

Problems or fears never get smaller by ignoring them. They actually grow in reality and perception.
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The next part of our discussion deals with anxiety and worry. For our purposes, we are making the following distinction between the two: **Anxiety** has to do with our feelings. **Worry** deals with the battle of the mind.

II. Anxiety

A. The problem of anxiety

1. One in every seven Americans is suffering from anxiety
2. At least 19 million Americans suffer from anxiety disorders—even more than those who suffer from depression. Anxiety Disorders affect about 40 million American adults age 18 years and older (about 18%) in a given year, causing them to be filled with fearfulness and uncertainty. Unlike the relatively mild, brief anxiety caused by a stressful event (such as speaking in public or a first date), anxiety disorders last at least 6 months and can get worse if they are not treated. (NIMH-Anxiety Disorders)
3. Anxiety is the number one mental health problem among American women and is second only to alcohol and drug abuse among men.
4. Currently, more people visit doctors for anxiety than for colds.

B. The definition of anxiety

The word anxiety comes from the Greek "to constrict," capturing the strong physical sensations of tightness prominent in anxiety disorders.

Anxiety is a feeling of nervousness, apprehension, fear, or worry. Anxiety is like fear only it is more *generalized*. We use the word fear in relation to specific situations or issues, but anxiety is more a generalized feeling less related to a specific situation.

Normal levels of anxiety are not necessarily bad; they can motivate us to action if we respond rightly to those feelings.

But when anxiety rises to the level of an excessive, irrational dread of everyday situations, it can be destructive to our lives. Excessive anxiety is like “fears gone wild.” You have all of the feelings of fear without the specific causes. It is often accompanied by physical sensations – heart palpitations, shortness of breath, stomachaches, or headaches. It can bring a sense of dread or panic.

Anxiety is a “messenger” that is telling you that you have one or more important life issues to address. For example. . .

- You may be overwhelmed by too many things going on at the same time – problems with health, money, marriage, children, work
- Anxiety might be a clue that there are problems in key relationships

- Deep down, your anxiety might reveal that you are struggling with the questions: “What is the meaning of life?” and “How do I find happiness?”

C. Kinds of anxiety

1. General anxiety - People with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) go through the day filled with exaggerated worry and tension, even though there is little or nothing to provoke it. They anticipate disaster and are overly concerned about health issues, money, family problems, or difficulties at work. Sometimes just the thought of getting through the day produces anxiety.
2. Social anxiety - is diagnosed when a person becomes overwhelmingly anxious and excessively self-conscious in everyday social situations. This person has an intense, persistent, chronic fear of being watched and judged by others and of doing things that will embarrass them.
3. Posttraumatic stress (PTSD) - develops after a terrifying ordeal that involved physical harm or the threat of physical harm. During WWI it was referred to as shell shock; during WWII it was called battle fatigue. Today it is applied to any situation where a normal person goes through an abnormal and traumatic experience such as rape, assault, a natural disaster, wartime combat duty, or suffers or witnesses a serious accident.
4. Panic Disorder- Panic attacks are sudden feelings of terror that strike without warning. These episodes can occur at any time, even during sleep. A person experiencing a panic attack may believe that he or she is having a heart attack or that death is imminent. The fear and terror that a person experiences during a panic attack are not in proportion to the true situation and may be unrelated to what is happening around them. Panic attacks are usually accompanied by a pounding heart, sweatiness, weakness, faintness, or dizziness. During these attacks, people may flush or feel chilled; their hands may tingle or feel numb; and they may experience nausea, chest pain, or smothering sensations. Panic attacks usually produce a sense of unreality, a fear of impending doom, or a fear of losing control.
5. Phobias - an intense fear of something that poses little or no actual danger. Some of the more common specific phobias are centered around closed-in places, heights, escalators, tunnels, highway driving, water, flying, dogs, and injuries involving blood. Such phobias aren't just extreme fear; they are irrational fear of a particular thing.
There may be some basis for your fears (past experiences), but in the present, a phobia is not a rational fear.
6. Obsessive-compulsive disorder - People with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) have persistent, upsetting thoughts (obsessions) and use rituals (compulsions) to control the anxiety these thoughts produce. Most of the time,

the rituals end up controlling them. For example, if people are obsessed with germs or dirt, they may develop a compulsion to wash their hands over and over again. If they develop an obsession with intruders, they may lock and relock their doors many times before going to bed.

D. The problem of anxiety

Fear is a normal, biologically adaptive reaction to real danger. By contrast, unfounded or unrealistic anxiety is an unhelpful, vague fear of hostility, of danger "around every corner" even when there's no real threat. Whether or not any real danger exists, fear arouses the body's autonomic (involuntary) nervous system. It evokes the "flight or fight" response, accelerating the heartbeat, preventing sleep and putting all senses on the alert. The hormone, norepinephrine, dilates the pupils, increases sweating, makes the hair stand on end and diverts blood to the working muscles. With anxiety there is a similar but uncalled-for "flight-fight" response, triggering norepinephrine production when there's nothing to fight or flee from. Anxiety that's disproportionate to reality can become a serious health problem. Human beings will not endure intense anxiety for long without feeling ill or developing a "phobic" avoidance of the fear-arousing situations or events. Unresolved or untreated anxiety problems may lead to clinical depression, alcoholism and suicidal tendencies.

Word about sleep

- Worry and anxiety can disrupt regular sleep as our minds dwell on our problems.
- Lack of sleep affects our ability to think clearly and we can become more reactive to troubling situations.
- Anxiety can increase with reduced sleep as we wonder how we will face our regular responsibilities. "I need sleep now or I won't be able to take care of my baby and toddler in the morning."
- Sleep problems can also be caused by many different medications and physical problems.
- To relieve insomnia caused by fear, anxiety and worry put into practice the principles listed here. You can also find *Insomnia - Guidelines and Study Guide* on the website: www.AnswersforWomen.net.

III. Worry

A. Understanding worry

Worry has to do with what is occupying the mind.

There is a difference between destructive worry and legitimate concern. It is good to be concerned about what your children are doing. Concern leads to creative, productive thinking that can help you address the issue of concern. Worry, on the other hand is unproductive, negative thinking.

Worry can show itself by

- Obsessing on blame. (whose fault is it)
- Imagining and then focusing on the worst things that could possibly happen (the what ifs)
- Collapsing into a *woe is me* mentality.

Worry is negative self-talk that distracts the mind from focusing on the problem at hand and leads to deeper feelings of anxiety that can further paralyze you.

B. The problem of worry

Worry is the least productive use of your mind. In fact it is destructive. It can separate relationships (you're busy blaming your husband when you could be working as a team). It keeps you from constructively thinking about things you can do.

Worry unnecessarily subjects you to all the feelings & emotions of tragedies that haven't happened. You react to people and situations as if your worries are reality. Have you ever lost a child at the park, at Disneyland, or at the store, and imagined all the terrible things that could have happened to them? By the time you find them you have exhausted yourself by experiencing tragedy after tragedy and when you find them you're angry with them for what they put you through.

Worrying leads to a victim mentality. You feel like there is nothing you can do about it. You blame others for making you worry. "If you would come home on time I wouldn't have to worry." "If you would call I wouldn't have to worry."

IV. Dealing with Anxiety & Worry

A. Slow down

Worry & anxiety thwarts clear thinking. Slow down – both your thinking and your breathing. The minute you begin to feel anxiety coming on work to take control of it by slowing down. Take a walk, sit outside, breathe slowly and rhythmically as this will prepare you to start thinking more clearly.

B. Win the battle of your mind

You have a choice: Often, we don't think we have a choice. "I'm a worrier. That's just the way I am. I don't have any control over my thoughts. What am I supposed to do, just stop worrying?" The answer is yes. I don't mean to imply that this is easy, but it's possible and it is a battle worth fighting. In the Bible there is a challenge to *take every thought captive*. If you believe you are a victim of the thoughts that race around in your mind, you will never engage in the battle to gain control. But if you begin to understand that you can control your thinking, you can begin to make progress. Note: this is a skill, it is not easy – so don't expect the battle for your mind to be easily won.

One thing that helps many is to journal.

Value of writing down your thoughts

- It slows us down. Anything that can slow us down when we are anxious or worried is going to help give us the clear thinking we need.
- Writing is a way of taking control of your thoughts. As long as they are floating around in your head, they feel out of control, or overwhelming. It helps me to list all the things that are troubling me, or that I have to do. They are more manageable when they are written down.
- When you write down your thoughts you will begin to see thought patterns. You will gain a clearer understanding of your good thinking and your destructive thought patterns.

Thoughts on what to journal

1. Journal your worries & fears. Write down your answers to the questions:
 - What am I worried about? What am I afraid of? Think specifically. For example, don't simply say, *I'm worried about my marriage*. Think specifically and write out what your specific fears are. For example, *I'm afraid my anger is going to drive my husband away*, or, *I'm afraid my husband is going to leave me*.

2. Journal to understand your situation more clearly. Learn to separate what is true from what you think you know.
 - Write down what you know to be true – If you are concerned about your job, some of the things you know are: there is a recession, the company is laying off people.
 - You know your husband is coming home late more often. You may think he is having an affair, but you don't know that. Sometimes, we might start treating our husband with the cold shoulder, or even hostility because of what we think! We might even prompt the action of which we are afraid! So separate what you know to be true from what you think to be true!
3. Journal possible actions that you can take that might have a positive impact on the situation that is causing you fear. Turn your focus away from your fears to what you can do. This will help to give you a sense of empowerment.

As you journal about your worries you will discover what Charles Spurgeon, a great preacher from the 19th century discovered:

Many of God's people are constantly under apprehension of calamities which will never occur to them, and they suffer far more in merely dreading them than they would have to endure if they actually came upon them. In their imagination, there are rivers in their way, and they are anxious to know how they shall wade through them, or swim across them. There are no such rivers in existence, but they are agitated and distressed about them...Such strange creatures are we that we probably smart more under blows which never fall upon us than we do under those which do actually come...our groundless fears are our chief tormentors.

It is true that we waste a lot of time and energy worrying about things that will never come to pass. If we could discipline our minds to deal with the real troubles of life, and not focus on the imagined troubles, we would have greater energy for life.

- C. Develop a simple, daily focus on the things you need to do today to make a difference in your life and in the lives of the people you love

Jesus had some great wisdom:

Matthew 6:34 ^(NLT) 34 **“So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.**

- D. When anxiety strikes don't over-react. This is especially true for panic attacks.

Note on dealing with panic attacks

- Wait – don't run away. Stay in the situation and allow the panic to decrease naturally.
- Remember that your feelings of panic are simply an exaggeration of normal responses to threat.
- Also remember that although the physical symptoms you experience may be unpleasant and uncomfortable, they are not dangerous.
- Try to see each panic attack as an opportunity to practice your coping skills. With practice you will learn how to cope with and control your feelings of panic.
- Focus on the here and now, not what you think will happen.
- Once your feelings of panic have started to decrease, give yourself a pat on the back for staying in the situation. Well done!

- E. Develop a friendship with a wise person who can encourage you in tough times, and challenge your thinking

Fear, anxiety, and worry can make us crazy. We don't think very well. That's why friends who will tell us the truth (not just what we want to hear) are so valuable in dealing with anxiety. Find someone who has a calm, peaceful approach to life and seek to develop a friendship with them. Ask them if they would be willing to talk with you when you are going through anxious situations and be willing to hear what they have to say.

CONCLUSION

Troubles and difficulties are a part of life. We will all experience them. But, satisfying answers to the problems of fear, worry and anxiety can't be found in human reason alone.

I have found a genuine experience of peace from my relationship with God.

For me, it is the promises of God that help me face both life and death with courage and peace instead of anxiety and fear.

Jesus says: “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you, not as the world gives do I give to you, Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid.”
(John 14:27)

The Bible also says:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

The reason why I can be strong and courageous and not fear is because God tells me in the Bible:

“I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.” ⁶ So we can say with confidence, “The LORD is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?” (Hebrews 13:5-6).

The reason I do not need to worry is because God promises to take care of me:

²⁵ “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? ²⁷ Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

²⁸ “And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, ²⁹ yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. ³⁰ And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

³¹ “So don't worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ ³² These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. ³³ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. (Matthew 6:25-33)

Knowing God does not make the experience of peace easy, but it does give me the resources to fight fear, anxiety, and worry to find genuine peace.