

Fear/Anxiety and the Gospel

Definitions

- fear – distress in the face of danger | opposite: *courage*
- anxiety – an intense desire for something, accompanied by fear of the consequences of not receiving it | opposite: *peace*

The challenge of “negative emotions”

- myth that “negative emotions” are bad or sinful
 - fear, anxiety, anger, jealousy, sadness/grief, etc
 - wrong to feel them | we should suppress these emotions
- myth that “positive emotions” are good
 - joy, gratitude, serenity, love, excitement, etc
- but the problem is that our emotions are disordered and unhealthy
- so often excessive and self-serving, and disconnected from God

Fear and anxiety are good

2 Corinthians 11:28

And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

2 Corinthians 11:2-3

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

1 Thessalonians 3:5

For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

Romans 9:1-2

I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit – that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

Fear and anxiety come from caring deeply

- Paul’s anxiety and fears came from his deep love for the churches
- but it didn’t go bad because it was rooted in trust in God
- emotional life of a Christian is rich and complex – intense emotions

The problem is when our emotions go bad

- emotional life becomes disconnected from God – inward, self-absorbed
 - our emotions become disordered and unhealthy and debilitating
-

(1) Think through your fears

- modern strategies have us “visualize” positive outcomes
- downplay the danger and risk | embrace optimism

Psalm 27:1-4

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

² When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.

³ Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.

⁴ One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in his temple

David imagines the worst scenario – surrounded by his enemies

- your problems are real – family in danger, bills to pay, health crisis
- peace is deep confidence and trust in God’s wise control of your life
- we’re anxious because we’re seeking illegitimate control over life

How do we get there? How find peace? | Seek the face of God

- “that I may dwell in the house of the Lord” – in presence of God
 - research: holding hand of loved one during painful procedure
 - “to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord”
 - beauty takes us out of ourselves | it decenters you
 - illustration: *Joe Versus the Volcano*
-

(2) Relocate your deepest concerns

Luke 10:40-42

⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to Jesus and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

Martha was anxious about good things – hospitality

- but displaced Jesus in the center | Mary had singular focus
- our fears and anxieties come from our idolatries

Matthew 6:31-33

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Anxiety – seeking from created things what only God can give you

- that’s why we fall apart when they are threatened
- but if you have God, his love and approval can never be taken away

(3) Courage comes from love

- courage is not the absence of fear | no fear makes you reckless fool
- but rather, courage is judgment something else is more important
- courage is presence of love – if love someone, you will run into danger

Jesus was afraid in the Garden of Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36-39

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” ³⁹ And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

In the garden, Jesus experienced deep distress and agony

- in Luke 22:44 – “his sweat became like great drops of blood”
- experienced a crushing, overwhelming horror – to point of death
- why? because of “the cup”
- Ezekiel 23:33 – “cup of ruin and desolation”
- Isaiah 51:22 – “cup of staggering and wrath”
- unfathomable agony, bottomless suffering – wrath of God

Jesus was alone – his disciples were asleep

- why didn’t Jesus run? he didn’t have to go to the cross

Hebrews 12:2

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Christianity is only religion that says God showed courage

- in the face of suffering and danger, Jesus ran into flames of judgment and death on the cross to rescue us
- if he loves us like that – we want love him back
- his love gives us courage to face our fears

Notes

Fear and anxiety are mostly interchangeable in Bible

- but distinguish between them:
- fear – distress in the face of danger | opposite: *courage*
- anxiety – an intense desire for something, accompanied by fear of the consequences of not receiving it | opposite: *peace*
- fear is present-oriented (acute) | anxiety is future-oriented (chronic)

Fear and anxiety are “negative emotions”

- unpleasant and difficult, involve suffering
- myth that “negative emotions” are bad or sinful | parents – fear, anxiety, anger, jealousy, sadness/grief, etc
- wrong to feel them | taught to suppress
- sort of like Marlboro Man – cool and unruffled, zen
- “positive emotions” are good – joy, gratitude, serenity, love, excitement, etc

But in Bible – emotions aren’t good or bad in themselves

- God created us as emotional creatures | God himself emotional being
- context of emotions that matter | and what do w/ them
- the problem is that our emotions are disordered and unhealthy
- so often excessive and self-serving, and disconnected from God

Fear and anxiety are good

2 Corinthians 11:28

And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. [same word: *merimnao*]

2 Corinthians 11:2-3

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

1 Thessalonians 3:5

For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. [“distress and affliction” in his worry for church]

Romans 9:1-2

I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit – that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

Portrait of Apostle Paul – constantly in distress and emotional turmoil

- these are not weaknesses in Paul, not moral flaws – setting an example
- showing us what emotional life of Christian is supposed to look like

B/c fear and anxiety are good – come from caring deeply

- Paul’s anxiety and fears came from his deep love for the churches
- lack of anxiety and fears isn’t good – callous and uncaring
- but properly balanced and didn’t go bad b/c rooted in trust in God
- underneath Paul’s anxiety and fears – deep confidence and trust in God

Paul shows us the rich and complex emotional life of a believer

- intense emotions – strong fears and anxieties b/c care deeply
- but an even stronger peace and courage comes from God

So often, people looking for – only feel ‘positive’ emotions

- cessation of ‘negative’ emotions – only feel happy and peaceful
- that is inherently selfish – detach yourself from others – don’t love others, love only yourself
- but as grow in faith, grow in love – feel more intensely, more deeply

The problem is when our emotions go bad

- emotional life become disconnected from God – inward, self-absorbed
- then, emotional life – disordered, unhealthy; excessive and debilitating

Be very careful – not saying, anxious people are worst sinners

- temperament, personality, genetics, brain chemistry, early childhood
- everyone suffers anxiety – but particular biological makeup big factor on whether becomes excessive and disproportionate
- anxiety comes from fallenness of human condition
- affects some of us more than others
- someone with anxiety disorder (18% of pop.) – devout believer

(1) Think through your fears

- one of modern strategies – “visualize” positive outcomes
- in other words – downplay the danger and risk
- be optimistic!
 - in fact, optimistic people are happier and more buoyant
 - pessimistic people are more prone to anxiety
- problem with optimism – only superficial and short-term fix
- ignoring or downplaying problems – but often make worse
- optimism is often disconnected from reality

The Bible’s answer is 180° different

Psalm 27:1-4

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

² When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,

it is they who stumble and fall.

³ Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;

though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.

⁴ One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:

that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,

to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in his temple

David imagines the worst scenario – surrounded by his enemies

- your problems often real – someone you love is in danger,
bills to pay, going health crisis
- foolish to ignore our fears | fear is often wise and truthful

Instead, David’s fear is put in the context of a greater truth

- greater truth is God – that gives enormous peace
- peace is deep confidence and trust in God’s wise control of your life
- when experience hardship, adversity – in God’s hands
- in fact, he may allow this terrible thing to happen – but I trust him
- we’re anxious because want illegitimate control over life

God sends on mission, puts on little boat – get end of river

- great, winding river | twists and turns, can’t see far ahead
- then suddenly, come upon rapids and rocks
- afraid (that’s natural) and anxious (that’s natural)
- realize, “wait a minute, God put me on this river” | intended
- life is an adventure | every moment was supposed to happen

How do we get there? How find peace? | Seek the face of God

- “that I may dwell in the house of the Lord”
 - talking about Temple | can’t live in Temple
 - David is talking about the face of God, presence of God

Research – holding hand of loved one during painful procedure

Objective truth – God is sovereign

- subjective experience of God’s presence

- “to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord”
 - beauty takes us out of ourselves | it decenters you
 - illustration: *Joe Versus the Volcano*
 - if catch a glimpse of glory and majesty of God, problems in context
-

(2) Relocate your deepest concerns

Luke 10:40-42

⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to Jesus and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

Martha was anxious about good things – hospitality, preparing meal

- our anxieties come from caring about good things
- but we’ve made good things ultimate things
- and displaced Jesus from the center
- but Mary had singular focus
- that orders our priorities – so secondary things become secondary
- if priorities are in order, then your emotions/perspective are healthy
 - suppose car crash, and smashed – but family escapes unharmed
 - do say, “oh no! my car!”
 - no, you kiss you family and feel overwhelming gratitude
- our fears and anxieties come from disordered priorities
- we’ve made other things more important than God
- anxiety is like smoke – follow smoke down to fire, idolatry

Matthew 6:31-33

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” ³² For the Gentiles *seek* after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But *seek first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Anxiety – seeking from created things what only God can give you

- that’s why we fall apart when they are threatened
 - financial anxiety is about finding your ultimate security
 - anxiety about loved ones b/c placed meaning and happiness in them
 - social anxiety comes from making opinions of others ultimate
 - if you have God, his love and approval can never be taken away
 - everything else is temporary and fading, but God is eternal
 - like earthquake, but standing on rock
-

(3) Courage comes from love

- courage is not the absence of fear | no fear makes you reckless fool
- but rather, courage is judgment something else is more important
- courage is presence of love – if love someone, you will run into danger

Illustration – house is on fire and person most love is inside

- without hesitation – run into flames to save your beloved
- love gives you courage | love overcomes fear

Jesus was afraid in the Garden of Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36-39

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” ³⁹ And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

In the garden, Jesus experienced deep distress and agony

- in Luke – “his sweat became like great drops of blood”
- experienced a crushing, overwhelming horror – to point of death
- why? – because of the “cup” | this is cup of God’s wrath
- Ezekiel 23:33 – “cup of ruin and desolation”
- Isaiah 51:22 – “cup of staggering and wrath”
- unfathomable agony and bottomless suffering – wrath of God

Jesus was alone – his disciples were asleep

- why didn't Jesus run? he didn't have to go to the cross

Hebrews 12:2

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

What is the joy?

- some – joy is glory of God | joy is rescue of God's people
- both

Christianity is only religion that says God showed courage

- Jesus saw us in the burning house of judgment and death
- and he ran into the flames of God's wrath to rescue us

- if you see him loving you like that
- you will love him back | and trust him with your life
- that will give you courage – b/c you love Christ