

How to be a non-anxious presence

28/29 February 2024

Leaders note: The temptation when we read passages such as these is to unintentionally trivialise anxiety – to see these scriptures as commands to “just stop worrying” – similar to “don’t murder or steal” and if we fail then we are being intentionally disobedient to God. That kind of response will only shame and alienate anyone who struggles with anxiety – instead we need to understand what it is and how to support those who are weighed down by it. Our prayer is that this session will be a time that feels safe and edifying and grace-filled for those who experience anxiety in any degree, but also will equip those who don’t experience severe anxiety to understand and be able to extend empathy and grace for those in their circles who do struggle with it.

Please read the below together in your group before reading and discussing the passages:

One definition of anxiety is “a free-floating sense of dread of things that might happen sometime in the future. It’s vague, it’s distant, it’s not really logical, but it’s the sense that something bad always happens and it’s about my turn. It comes from the root word meaning “to choke”; “to squeeze”; “to take your breathe away”. It’s a close cousin to fear but not its twin. Fear sees a threat, anxiety imagines one. Fear results in flight or flight when it sees a snake. Anxiety results in the decision to never walk barefoot anytime anywhere because somewhere in the world there’s snake. It’s a general angst about life. And it steals our breath and health. It weighs a person down.”

- Max Lucado

A non-anxious person was a term coined by psychologist Edward Friedman and refers to someone who doesn’t get caught up in the emotion of the other person/hype around them. They have a healthy sense of boundaries with others – whether family/colleagues – this person can step in and be calm, at peace, wise, compassionate, loving,

empathetic but firm... able to stop the cycle of panic and anxiety that seems to be riling everyone else up.

How do I become this non-anxious presence in my family/place of work / influence? The below two passages offer us a way to become this kind of presence.

1. **Read Matt. 6:25 – 34.** On Sunday Felix invited us to:

- **Know** how important our lives are to God (vs. 25-27);
- **Experience** the care God has for us (28-30);
- **Live** the life God has given us in His kingdom today (31-34)

Share which of these three invitations resonates most with you and which of them you find more difficult.

2. **Reread vs. 34** – When we live in the future, it’s easy to become anxious – there’s something about being grounded in the present that staves off anxiety. Discuss.

Optionally refer to C.S. Lewis’ quote below as you do so:

“God’s ideal is a man who, having worked all day... washes his mind of the whole subject, commits the issue to heaven, and returns at once to the patience or gratitude demanded by the moment that is passing over him. But (the enemy) want a whole society perpetually in pursuit of the rainbow’s end, never honest, nor kind, nor happy now, but always using as mere fuel wherewith to heap the altar of the future every real gift which is offered them in the Present.”

The Screwtape Letters

3. In speaking about our presence on social media and the internet, author and speaker Mark Sayers challenges all Christians with this invitation - *“Can we as the church be*

plugged into this digital nervous system as a non-anxious presence rooted in Christ?"

Considering the passage in Matt. 6:25 –34, and discuss in your group what it would look like for you to be "plugged into this digital nervous system as a non-anxious presence rooted in Christ" . This applies to physical rooms and online platforms that you are regularly engaging in.

4. Read Phil 4:4-8

In 4:4-5, why do you think Paul starts this section off with a command to rejoice? (*Someone who is able to praise is someone who remembers who the King is and who's Kingdom this really is... when this person looks around and – still recognising the risks – instead of caving into the anxiety, leans into the God who has proven steadfast and faithful*)

5. There are 2 invitations in Phil. 4:6-8 – what are they?

- *(to pray with thanksgiving;*
- *to fill our mind with whatever is true, pure, noble, right, lovely and noble).*

6. Why would he invite us to do these things in the face of the potential to be anxious?

- *Pray with thanksgiving – reminds us we are not alone – connected to God; naming the issue somehow grounds and normalises it – it reduces the proverbial mountain back to a molehill; thanksgiving – gratitude is an incredible antidote to discontentment which is often at the root of our anxious thought patterns*

- *Think about such things... the basis of anxiety is also often untrue beliefs that we are anchored to – do we contribute to the ambient anxiety and anxious buzz as we feed the online appetite for mayhem and panic and frenzy when we repost or retweet things or do we instead nip it in the bud and rather speak seeds of truth that we find in God's Word?*

7. What might be the place of a Connect Group / larger church community in caring for people when we struggle with anxiety? What would it look like?

(To be a non-anxious presence we need both:

- *Deep trust in God and*
- *release of the deep human urge or need to control the chaos and mystery and pain of our life and to manage and manipulate the people and circumstances of our lives to get what we want)*

It's not just about being less anxious – it's about being people of love. That's Jesus ultimate desire for us, and the only way we can do that is we are a people who are marked by a deep trust in and surrender to Jesus.

Take a few minutes to discuss when might it be necessary to seek help from a medical professional or a therapist or counsellor. Thank God for these professional who are trained and skilled to support those with acute anxiety and panic disorders.

Pray:

- *for understanding and grace for those who struggle with anxiety*
- *for God's truth and peace to fill their hearts and minds and bodies*
- *for those who care for and support people who struggle with anxiety and panic disorder*