

## Overcoming Anxiety

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, “When lust takes control, God becomes unreal to us.” Such is the case with anxiety as well. When deep concerns burden our spirit and we become preoccupied with those people and circumstances beyond our control, anxiety begins to take on a life of its own. God commences to grow smaller in our eyes; at the same time our problems grow larger. Therefore, God’s instruction is: *“Humble yourself under God’s mighty hand and in due time He will lift you up.”* (1 Peter 5:6) His invitation is subsequent to his instruction, *“Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”* (1 Peter 5:7) So how do we cast our anxiety on Him?

**We cast our anxiety upon God by prayer.** Prayer is God’s prescription for keeping the deep concerns of our lives from becoming debilitating anxiety. *“..The Lord is near. 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 minds in Christ Jesus.”* (Phil 4:5-7) Within this invitation lie numerous insights regarding our battle with anxiety.

**Prayers that cast our anxiety upon God capture the most elementary expression of prayer—dependence.** God uses the painful circumstances of our lives to bring us to the point of trust, saying, “Lord, I can’t, I believe you can; therefore, I surrender.” Such anxiety battling prayer is preventative. As God relieves our anxiety, we learn to go to Him in prayer before the anxiety grips us.

**Prayer that casts our anxiety on God is a lifestyle.** “Do not be anxious... In everything pray.” Such prayer is love-oriented. “By prayer,” the passage teaches. This Greek word is the common word for worship and adoration. Vital prayer is a response to the love of Christ which grips us. *“This is love, not that we loved God, but God loved us....”* (1 Jn. 4:10) The more we focus on God’s unending love, the greater our prayers will reflect a love orientation towards Him, resulting in worship and adoration.

**Prayer which relieves anxiety is specific.** *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”* The story is told about C. H. Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher. He was listening to one of his students pray. The student, with great verbosity and theological precision, rehearsed the story of God’s redemptive work. Spurgeon, quite exasperated by the student’s long prayer, got up from his chair, tapped the student on the shoulder and said, “Call Him Father, ask Him for something, and sit down.”

**Prayer which relieves anxiety is not just specific with its request; it is also accompanied with thanksgiving.** An often overlooked part of the preceding prayer is “with thanksgiving.” Our prayers, whether confessional or supplicational, are to be characterized by thanksgiving. Thanksgiving not only brings praise for God’s works, but diminishes the focus on ourselves.

**Prayer which casts our anxiety on God claims a promise.** *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”* (4:7) Think of a guard, marching back and forth, protecting the entrance of a castle. This is what Christ, our sufficient High Priest, does on our behalf. When we pray, Christ our Sentinel marches back and forth, guarding our hearts and minds, securing an experiential peace – such peace that is the result of daily prayer in its most elementary expression. “O God, I am not able, I will trust you are able and willing to do what is best for me; therefore, I will trust you.”