

Confronting Anxiety, Part II

By Eddie Spencer

One of my favorite Biblical phrases reads, “...take hold of life that is truly life” (1 Tim. 6:19). Jesus, speaking of such a “*life that is truly life*” says, “*I have come that they [my sheep] may have life, and have it to the full*” (Jn. 10:10). This is the promise of the Christ-follower. Sadly, there are many enemies to “*life that is truly life*” in Christ. One of the most insidious enemies is anxiety.

The Biblical word “anxiety” literally means “to divide” or “tear apart.” Worry comes from an Anglo-Saxon word which means, “to strangle” or “choke.” Such word descriptions are accurate pictures of the effects of anxiety on our life. Therefore, how do we seek to conquer such a formidable foe?

First, the answer is prayer. “*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him for He cares for you*” (1 Peter 5:6-7). This is the invitation of prayer. “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God*” (Phil. 4:6). For additional information about this aspect of conquering anxiety, please see my previous article in “Kingdom Calling.”

Secondly, we confront our anxiety with right thinking. The feelings which accompany anxiety are what we hate. But in practical order, bad thinking precedes bad feelings. Jesus, the Creator of our souls, understands this. Many of us know His exhortation regarding worry. “*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life. Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own*” (Matt. 6:25, 34). Jesus not only exhorts us about worry, but teaches us how to live a life without it. If you read between these verses, which are the bookends of a passage on God’s kingdom, you will note some key words and phrases. “**Look** at the birds of the air. **See** how the lilies of the field grow. *If that is how God clothes the grass of the field...will He not much more clothe you?*” (Matt. 6:26, 28, 30). Jesus does not say, “Don’t worry; just believe.” Instead, Jesus says, “Don’t worry; look, see, and consider.” If God will take care of the birds and the fields, will He not take care of us? Jesus teaches us to think rightly about God and to trust Him.

We confront anxiety with right thinking. Right thinking means thinking Biblically and reasonably. Much of the debilitating feelings we experience are the result of labored, negative thought patterns. A way to overcome many negative feelings is to battle those feelings with right thoughts. The Scripture says, “*Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy— think about such things*” (Phil. 4:8). This is the opposite of when we take the seed of a bad event or experience in our lives, water it with negative thought patterns, and produce a harvest of worse case scenarios. For example, a pilot flying an airplane is subject to vertigo. This means that when flying, up can appear to be down and down can appear to be up. A pilot may see blue skies and feel that he is headed in the right direction, yet his instruments might indicate otherwise. Does he go by his sensory perceptions or by his instruments? Does he do what he *feels* is right or does he place his *trust* in the instruments placed there to guide him? Anxiety so easily grips us when we listen to the static of our hearts instead of the wisdom of God’s instrument, His Word.

Two promises from God’s Word, which are foundational to our battle with anxiety, are: **God is sovereign and God is good.** God is sovereign. “*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows*” (Matt. 10:29-31). The hymn is true, “His eye is on the sparrow,” but it is not quite as sentimental as the hymn portrays. Jesus does not say that bad things do not happen to sparrows. Jesus teaches that nothing happens to sparrows (or to us) that is outside of God’s providential care and purpose. The truth of God’s Sovereignty may cause us to struggle, because it confronts our desire to will and be free, yet when it grips us, few truths on earth can comfort us more. God has His sure and certain purposes in all things. In addition, God’s purposes for us are good!

The interconnected truth is that the Sovereign God is good and we call Him “Abba, Father.” He has our best eternal interest in the purposes of His heart. This is an integral part of His glory. “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose*” (Rom. 8:28). Anxiety, like so many of our struggles, shrinks God and puts us right at the center of the universe. Sadly, some of us must learn repeatedly that we do not have the power or the will to be rulers over life’s circumstances. Peace comes when we trust God to be God, relying on His promise that His sovereign purposes in our lives will be good.