

“Age of Anxiety (Part I)”

The Way of Jesus

Downtown & Lexington

November 1, 2020

We’re going to dive right into our text for today that we just heard Kate read. We had originally planned to break this passage into two weeks. But the truth is they are really interwoven chunks, so we’re going to spend two weeks on this passage. Jesus continues teaching the theme we’ve seen the past few weeks in the Sermon on the Mount - do you do what you do for God and His kingdom or for some other benefit? Now, He shifts His focus to money and anxiety. Let’s pick it up in Matthew 6:19.

Matthew 6:19-34

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

This is a pretty well-known passage - Jesus says our heart and money are connected. Our money flows toward and exposes what we love.

22 The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, **23** but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

(It’s a really confusing metaphor for us as Modern westerners. We’ll actually come back and unpack this next week.)

24 No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

(Pressing more on what our heart loves and where our money goes. Our heart can’t be ultimately divided, God or money. Only one can be our true master. Now note this in verse 25:

25 Therefore,

(That word is Jesus telling us that these are connected ideas, not a totally new topic...)

I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.

He continues with a really famous, often quoted and referenced teaching. Look at the lilies and the sparrows. God feeds them and clothes them. Don’t you know He cares about you more? Let’s skip to verse 31:

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. **34** Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

So today we're going to focus on the command that Jesus repeats three times:

- 25 Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life...
- 31 Therefore do not be anxious...
- 34 Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Here's a pro tip: When Jesus repeats a command 3 times in 10 verses, that's a good indicator He's serious about it.

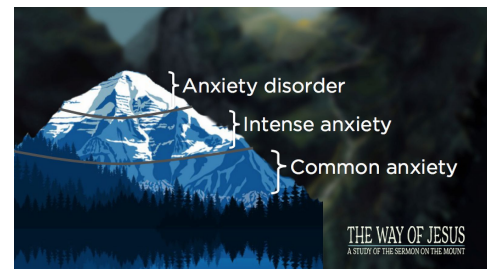
We're calling these two weeks **the Age of Anxiety - Part 1 and Part 2.**

And because anxiety is such a big and broad term I want to start with a little illustration of how I think about anxiety. This isn't clinical or professional from a book. For me it's a helpful illustration that sums up a lot of my Biblical and pastoral and personal experience:

Level 1 - Common anxiety. The bottom of the mountain is very broad. Everyone experiences this part. Day to day anxious, fearful, or worried thoughts and feelings.

Level 2 - Intense anxiety. This may or may not be clinical or diagnosed, but it's a more intense season of anxiety. It's anxious, fearful or worried thoughts that you can't shake. At the top, we could be getting into Generalized Anxiety disorder.

Level 3 - Anxiety disorders. The top of the mountain is reserved for those special few of us, real overachievers. These are clinical, diagnosed disorders. Panic disorders. Intense phobias. OCD. Social anxiety. GAD.



And what Jesus has to say to us about anxiety today applies to all of us, no matter where you are on the mountain. And honestly, it applies massively, because anxiety is everywhere:

- ADAA - Anxiety and Depression Association of America - Anxiety disorders are now the most common mental illness in America. 40 million+ Americans 18 and older affected.
- According to the National Institute of Mental Health - 19.1% of adults in America - almost 1 in 5 - dealt with an anxiety disorder in the last year. And 31.1% of U.S. adults experience an anxiety disorder at some time in their lives. Almost 1 in 3.
- Anxiety disorders are treatable, but only **36.9%** of those suffering receive treatment. As much as we've destigmatized anxiety disorders, still a lot of people suffering without help.
- As our Family Discipleship pastor, I'm always really interested in how this stuff affects our adolescents - NIMH - 31.9% of those 13-18 deal with anxiety disorders. And it's really dangerous because serious anxiety is directly tied to suicide, which has grown drastically in the past 20 years, and is now the 2nd highest cause of death for people age 15-24.

Let me give you **my backstory with anxiety:** For the first 25 years of my life, anxiety was a stranger. I'm very laid back. Type B. Go with the flow.

And then I married Erica and it was the first time I got to see anxiety up close and personal... and I didn't understand. Erica would be having a tough day. I'd lovingly and graciously engage as a godly, supportive husband, I'd say "Yo girl, what's wrong with you?" ... Eventually, she'd say "I think I'm a little anxious." And I'd say, "Oh cool. What are you anxious about?!" And she'd say, "I'm not anxious about anything..." And I was dumbfounded... "Honey, that's not how anxiety works. You can't be anxious about nothing... You have to be anxious about SOMETHING... because then I can fix it... and if I fix the thing you're anxious about, I can fix your anxiety and we'll both realize that I'm. a. hero."

The truth is I was sitting there thinking she didn't know how anxiety works when in reality, I was the one who didn't know how serious intense anxiety works.

I learned this the hard way in the fall of 2018. I had just finished a wonderful 3-month sabbatical. Erica and I took a dream vacation up the West Coast. WITH NO KIDS!!

I got back to Columbia, ready to get back to work... and something just broke in me.

Anxiety skyrocketed. I started losing sleep. I'd wake up in the night feeling like I was having a heart attack. Thinking about ... nothing. But anxious in my bones. Adrenaline surging. Started having intense social anxiety. I'd panic about going into rooms with people that I loved, convinced that I bothered them and I was making everything worse.

My anxiety really peaked with really dark, painful, and eventually suicidal thoughts. I just couldn't take it. I was drowning in anxiety outside of my mental or physical control.

So I don't know what your experience with the anxiety mountain has been:

- Maybe you have dealt with or are dealing with intense anxiety right now.
- Maybe you're dealing with or living with someone who has a lot of anxiety.
- Maybe you're like me in my first 25 years where intense anxiety is kind of foreign, and you just have some common anxious thoughts and feelings from time to time.

But no matter where you're at, Jesus has a lot of help for us, and statistically, it's very likely that in your lifetime, you or someone you love will deal with intense anxiety. So we've got two weeks to unpack this. For today, we'll start with the reality of what anxiety is. And next week we'll talk about what do we do about it?

But here's the reality of anxiety:

1.) Anxiety is a multi-faceted invasive part of human existence.

Did you notice how Jesus didn't say, "If you deal with anxiety..."? He didn't say, "if you ever find yourself in a rare and surprising moment of anxiety." No. He simply says, do not be anxious.

He assumes rightly that anxiety is and has been a normal part of life on planet earth since Gen 3 when humanity declared independence from God's good rule and reign.

Now it can show up in all kinds of ways:

It can be really specific or broader. Jesus touches on both here in verses 25 and 31. "What am I going to wear, what am I going to eat, what are we going to drink?" Those are really specific concerns.

But He also says, "Don't be anxious about your life" in verse 25 and "do not be anxious about tomorrow," in verse 34 which demonstrates the much more broad and general concerns we may have.

Sometimes we're anxious about specific what ifs - "Am I going to get the job? Am I going to lose my job? What if this pain is actually a bad disease? What if I can't pay this medical bill? What if this relationship doesn't work out? What if our marriage is never better than this? What if we never have kids? What if our kid gets sick? What if my kids aren't developing like other kids? What if she doesn't make friends? What if his friends are bad influences? What if they never move out?"

AHHHHH. Specific concerns."

And other times our worried thoughts are much more broad - "What if my life just doesn't turn out how I want? What if the future gets worse and worse? There's a lot of data in 2020 that things can't get worse... but what if they do? What if I never get married? What if I'm always alone?"

Sometimes our anxiety and fear live in the mind. Specific thoughts like here.

Other times, it's in our emotions.

Proverbs 12:12

An anxious heart weighs a man down.

Other times, it's in our bodies. See it with Jesus in the garden facing His coming false trial and crucifixion.

Luke 22:44

And being in agony he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood.

Proverbs 3 says when we trust in the Lord instead of anxiously relying on our own understanding, it brings healing to our bodies and refreshment to our bones. This is a real physical thing. We sometimes refer to physical anxiety as stress. Autonomic nervous system responding to feeling out of control. We prepare for fight or flight, but for no known reason. It can lead to tightness, pain or pressure in the chest. Great if you're already feeling stressed, right?

Stress can burn your body out from the inside. You get ulcers, hypertension, heart attack, headaches, weight gain. Almost every medical condition is made worse by stress.

Anxiety can focus on the past, present, or future. A lot of Matthew 6 is focused on future-focused anxiety. Toward the **past**, we tend to call it regret or shame. "Why did I do that? Why did I say that? Why did that happen to me?" See it with Peter after He denies Jesus, Luke 22:62 says he realized it and "he went out and wept bitterly."

Toward the **present** - Just a nagging sense that something's wrong. "She hasn't texted in a few days? Does she hate me?" Always wondering what's about to break. One author described it as constantly hearing the low bass notes from Jaws and you're just looking around for the fin. (Jake)

And then there's this whole other aspect of anxiety that is more existential/metaphysical. Romans 8 talks about how creation itself and us as individuals are groaning. Wanting a world that's put back right. Martin Heidegger and German existentialists had this incredible word - "*geworfenheit*" ... it means thrown-ness, the feeling of being off-kilter, like the world lacks rhyme or reason. That's a great word for 2020. Whatever stage of life you're in. School is off-kilter. Which means parenting is out of wack. Work is weird. Nothing is quite normal. "*Geworfenheit*."

Here's the point. Anxiety can show up in all kinds of ways for all kinds of reasons. Intense thoughts or vague feelings. Grey, muddled thoughts, or physical pain.

2.) In some ways, anxiety is telling us the truth.

Henry Cloud says anxiety is like an indicator light on a dashboard telling you something is going on underneath. And putting duct tape over the light doesn't actually fix the problem. Burying our anxious thoughts doesn't fix them. We have to dig into them and figure out what's underneath.

- So that existential sense that something is wrong in the world and in me. That's true, isn't it? Romans 8 tells us creation itself is groaning because our anxiety is telling us the truth. Nothing is exactly as it should be in the world.
- The anxious sense of feeling out of control... That's actually true, isn't it? We aren't nearly as in control as we'd like to think. In v. 27 Jesus says- "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" What he's saying is, "Listen. Who's been keeping your life going all these years? It wasn't you."

Let's put it this way. When a doctor gives you bad news, when your boss fires you... we suddenly feel anxious like life is out of control. But that bad moment is just revealing what was always true. We were never in control. We were always vulnerable. We weren't keeping our life going in the first place. Our sense of control was only an illusion.

See, the reality is that anxiety is telling us the truth, but only in part... and it points to solutions but those are only partial solutions too.

3.) Anxiety is a misguided search for security and hope for a certain kind of tomorrow. Jesus hits this throughout this passage:

Matthew 6:19

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal...

Let's skip down to verse 26,

Matthew 6:26

Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns...

Barns and laid up treasures are not **just** about luxury, they're about security. I find it fascinating that a general term in investing for stocks, bonds, all kinds of investments is "financial securities". **Our anxiety wants security.** We want to feel safe and stable... We want answers to the unknown questions of what might happen tomorrow, but we know we live in a broken world. We know there are real things that are really not right. We long for Eden lost.

So what we do is we look to all kinds of things to be for us and to give us a certain sense of security that will quiet our nagging anxious thoughts.

In this passage, he specifically mentions looking to money and finances to provide us with this sense of security. If I just have enough. If my barns are full. Then I'll know that I'm ok and I can handle whatever comes my way.

But He also points at the hole in this security plan. It's not secure enough. He mentions thieves, moth, and rust. If Jesus was talking to us, maybe He would have mentioned identity theft and oh I dunno, maybe pandemics that crash global economies?

But the truth is, money isn't the only place we look for security.

We look to people and specifically romantic relationships for a sense of okayness with our unknown future. "As long as I've got you... everything will be ok."

- And then the breakup comes and our whole sense of security is shattered.

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We look to jobs and careers for both financial and emotional confidence. I'm doing something I'm good at. I'm providing for me and enough to share a bit with those I love or those in need.

- And then the job disappears ... or an accident happens and you can't do the job anymore.

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We look to our parents for security and then they get divorced or have a mid-life crisis ...

We look to our family and our kids for security... this one is particularly tempting to moms... As long as my kids and my family are ok... or at least as long as we look good, then I know I'm doing a good job and I have security and worth... But then you put this massive pressure on your kids and you can't handle it when they fail to meet expectations. Because you're using them like an emotional barn to give you a false sense of security.

I'll tell you a huge place we look to for security and hope... **Politics.** It's not an accident that God lined up this passage for this week, right before the Election.

We're putting out a bunch of political resources on the sermon page and social media and just recorded the midweek podcast all about political anxiety. Because politicians and political parties know that anxiety makes us susceptible to fear-mongering and peddling false hopes. They all promise a utopian future if you vote for them and a dystopian world on fire if you vote for the other guy.

Can I give you a little word of encouragement? Jesus is the guy holding the universe together. He's not anxious about the results of Tuesday. Jesus is our Prince of Peace. We put our deepest trust in Him and His kingdom, not earthly rulers who cannot bring salvation. Revelation 21 promises that someday, He is coming back and He's bringing His kingdom where there will be no more pain, sin, tears, sickness. For now, we vote and we pray and we debate ideas graciously with those we disagree with... all the while focusing on Jesus and His kingdom way.

We'll get more into what how we deal with anxiety next week, but for today, I just want to leave us with one great encouragement that Jesus gives us three times in this passage.

Matthew 6:26, 28-32

26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

28 ...Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, **29** yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **30** But if God so clothes the grass of the field, ... will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

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.

Did you hear His refrain? It's the refrain Brandon showed us last week that Jesus started in the Lord's prayer. You've got a good Father. God is your good, good Father. And He doesn't need your help holding the universe together. You can literally sleep like a baby because you are God's adopted baby. Don't suppress your anxious and worried thoughts and feelings. Dig into them. Find out the lies you're believing about God and His love for you.

You know there are days you can't figure out how to reset your Netflix password. Him? He's actively feeding more than 400 billion birds around the face of the planet. You can trust Him.

You? There are days you can't cook toast without setting it on fire. Him, setting a daily feast for sparrows. Now He's not gonna let you believe you're in charge and He is going to expose all the way your false sources of security are false... but that's actually good news. Because you're not in charge... and our false sources of security are ... false.

And He never fails His promises. He always makes good on His word. We can trust in Him.

We'll get into how we deal with our anxiety next week, but for this week can I just encourage you with my own story. Jesus has been unbelievably faithful to set me free from crippling slavery to anxiety.

Hey, one parting word if you're at the middle or top layer of the anxiety mountain: I know commands to not be anxious can feel really frustrating and feel defeating. "Like, you know I don't turn this on and off like a lightswitch right?" or "Great... now I'm anxious about how I feel incapable of escaping my own anxiety. Thanks, Jesus!" Man, I hate it for you, and know that I'm praying for you. Get the help you need. That's probably gonna involve some good counseling and medication. That's always gonna include investing in the Bible, prayer, and community to point you to the truth of God who is a good, good Father.

Let's Pray.