

Adorn the Hidden Person of the Heart - Part 2

We covered last night how our body is connected to our heart and how the thoughts of our heart adversely affect our feelings which in turn create a negative impact upon our body. We can suffer from many maladies due to wrong thinking, as well as not taking care of our bodies with how we eat, sleep and exercise. When we focus on our fears of the unknown and the uncertainties of life, we create our own anxiety. Instead as believers we should obey the command of Colossians 3:2-3 which says, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Now we need to understand that fear has a broad range of meaning in the English language. Reverence and respect that we may label as fear can be helpful and not sinful when it causes us to be aware of physical and spiritual danger or it motivates us to physical or spiritual action. Fear is, however, sinful and not helpful when we allow it to take the form of anxiety in our hearts and minds. Anxiety stops us from fulfilling biblical responsibilities. It does not push us closer to God and dependency upon him. Anxiety does not trust God.

Here is the main point to remember. Anxiety comes from responding to the uncertainties of life with a wrong view of God. We become anxious by wrong thinking about those uncertainties. And God's Word tells us to be anxious for nothing and not to fear anything outside of the fear of the Lord. So we are responsible for our own anxious and fearful

thoughts. The good news is that we can do something about our fear with God's help. There is good news for those who worry -- they are great at meditation! The uncertainties that are plaguing them - those "what if" questions that keep them up at night and affect their actions and attitudes during the day are keeping them in fearful anxiety as they meditate on them. Instead of meditating on uncertainties, we need to begin meditating on God's character and the certainty of Who He is and what He has promised.

Jim Berg's study *Taking Time to Quiet Your Soul* shows the pattern that follows the anxiety-generated noise in your soul as, first, a sense of uncertainty. You believe you are not safe and you must have something more. Then you begin to be discontent with the uncertainty in your life. You dislike the fact that you don't have the certainty that you want. This leads to an effort to achieve certainty by whatever means possible. You decide to get what you want by your own means and control. You become discontent. You want more and you need more. You must do something to be relieved of this anxiety that is not going away.

Paul tells us in Hebrews 13:5 to be content with what you have. To say we must have something more to deal with our anxiety is covetousness. Covetousness says, "Who God is does not satisfy me. What He has supplied does not satisfy me. I must have something more." I need to have more money to feel safe, a husband, a certain score on a test or better grades, attention or friends to feel loved, etc. And, of course, the root of covetousness is, like all sin, unbelief. It all comes

back to not believing that God is enough. There is a diagram on Page 8 of the study guide that is an excellent resource to review often for these matters.

Paul says in Philippians 4:11 - I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. And then what does he say in Philippians 4:13? I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Contentment is a mark of Christian maturity. One commentator has said contentment is defined as that quiet spirit which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition. In other words, when we are satisfied with the way things are because God is more than enough for us, we are content. When we know God well, we can and should trust Him. When we trust Him, we can be at rest. We can be content.

Now we need to understand that a believer's contentment is not just a passive resignation where you talk yourself into a frame of mind by human logic. We are not talking here about positive thinking. You must renew your mind with God's Word and submit yourself to its truth. It involves preaching to yourself what is true in your situation from God's perspective. Contentment is something that becomes a habit as we grow in our knowledge of God.

So a biblical approach for when we become fearful or anxious is to cultivate certainty as we believe we are safe in God's care. He is sovereign, wise and loving, and He is in the midst of our situation with us. If that is true, and it is, we then can be content with whatever we are experiencing. We do not need anything more to do God's will today. We can trust Him

and leave those "what ifs" behind. And this leads us into freedom to serve God and others. We can then put all our efforts into serving God and others today because we know He will give us exactly what we need. This is true rest, true peace in God.

Believing what God has said about Himself is the root of contentment. Romans 15:13 says - Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joy and peace from God lead to contentment. If God is the biggest thing in your life - not your situations which are causing stress and anxiety - then you don't need anything else, nor do you want it. You know that God is more than enough. I am sure we all agree with that statement, but we don't experience it all the time.

On Page 14 in your conference handout is a list describing who God is with many verses covering a variety of ways you can encourage yourself with the truth of the sufficiency of God in your situation. This may be a helpful resource to rehearse truth. However, instead of filling our minds with these types of truths, we can tend to allow obsessive thoughts to creep in. Obsessions are unrestrained doubts that develop as we attempt to control the uncertainty in life by repeatedly thinking through the problem and all its possibilities. These uncertainties can be normal concerns of daily life or anxious/junk thoughts that come from our hearts.

We can have doubts about health - For example, Bob has the possibility of developing cancer sometime. I'm sure you

all have a situation where you are tempted to doubt God or grow discontent with regards to health whether it is your health or the health of a loved one. Or maybe you have doubts about your responsibilities - What if I don't do well at my job and I get fired? What if I'm not really saved?

We can have doubts about all kinds of situations that are out of our control, such as a child going to college or marrying someone which takes them far from home. We can have doubts about relationships - What if I never get married? What if I am married and my husband never changes and I am stuck in this bad marriage forever? What if my teenager gets in trouble with drugs or becomes sexually active or never gets saved?

When you think about certain people or events, do they automatically trigger a series of anxious/junk thoughts that you immediately rehearse in your mind, which in turn causes anger, stress or anxiety? It may be that you have been wronged or intentionally hurt, and you find that you are obsessed with these thoughts and cannot seem to stop thinking about that person or situation.

As you mature in your walk with the Lord, you are able to recognize that those thoughts are coming from a heart that is, as Jeremiah 17:9 says, "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." You acknowledge that those thoughts are sinful. They are causing you to focus on yourself and not on God who is sovereign over all those people and situations. Instead we should thank God for the reminder of sin's destructive nature and trust in our victory in Christ when we have those anxious thoughts.

You can scare yourself with your negative thoughts. As you meditate on these possibilities or uncertainties, you can create an imaginary crisis. And guess what happens? Your body interprets imaginary crises of your mind as real emergencies, so it will kick into action with detrimental effects. In other words, you are harming yourself with your thoughts.

Obsessive thoughts are common reactions of normal people to seemingly overwhelming challenges and doubts when you do not know or trust God well. Some of those thoughts may even seem crazy, but because you are overwhelmed by life's problems and are spiritually unprepared for them, you let them persist. At times, people struggling with these sinful thoughts are put on medications to "solve the problem" instead of addressing the real heart issues. We must be careful in how we think about these things.

Because the real issue is the sowing and reaping results we find in James 1:14-15 - Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.

It starts with a lust or strong desire to be certain about something before you will let your soul rest. Then you are enticed to do something else sinful to fulfill your desire, like worry. Then when lust or desire has conceived, it gives birth to more sin. You give in to worry and avoid responsibility for your thoughts. You don't take the thoughts captive. Then sin, if we let it get to be full grown, gives

birth to death. People in this position experience a deadening impact on every aspect of their life, both spiritually and physically.

Obsessive or anxious thoughts change our body chemistry with results of greater agitation, feelings of panic, and more uncertainty and doubt, which leads to more obsessive or anxious thoughts to try to fix the agitation. In other words, it's a vicious cycle. Unbiblical responses to uncertainty produce anxiety which can lead to obsessive thinking. And obsessive thinking is the root of compulsive behavior. We can also mishandle anxiety with controlling behaviors, like being a perfectionist.

The perfectionist is dear to my heart. I definitely lean toward that direction. As Jim Berg says, we may appear to be the Energizer bunny but we soon become the terrorizer rabbit! Perfectionists have a preoccupation with orderliness in one or more areas of life. This can lead to a predisposition toward seeking control over our vulnerabilities and thus attempting to remove doubt in our own efforts. It gives us a feeling of having some control. We can have preoccupations with keeping our physical appearance and those of our family in order, our surroundings in order, performance in order, schedules and responsibilities in order, spiritual disciplines in order, finances in order, health in control, relationships in order. There is a list you will look at in your time alone that covers those areas.

Anxiety can also result in compulsive behaviors which are excessive, repetitive activities that seem to give

temporary relief from the obsessive thoughts that plague the mind, even when negative effects are experienced. There are ritualistic behaviors such as repeated hand-washing; checking and rechecking locks, stove controls; repeatedly asking for assurances of love and forgiveness. And then there are destructive behaviors like self-inflicted injury. Anxiety can result in avoidance behaviors where you will do anything to escape the feeling of being overwhelmed. This could be an escape to isolation or to pleasure like sex, alcohol, gambling, drugs, or even social media, eating food, or hobbies for comfort instead of God. Stuart Scott says the problem is not the problem. The problem is our response to the problem. How can we respond biblically to life's challenges?

You see, anxiety is a spiritual problem which needs a spiritual answer. It is a fear that I will not get what I want or need. It is driven by unbelief and discontentment and is always reflected as a spiritual problem in the Bible. Therefore we must deal with it as a spiritual problem or all we can expect to find is further isolation from God and further complications from our anxiety. We must go to God and entrust ourselves to Him as Sarah did and as other Holy Women of Old did, like Hannah and Mary; and also how Christ responded in 1 Peter 2, entrusting Himself to the Father.

Jeremiah 2:13 - For my people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. We must come to God and be willing to let God search our anxious thoughts and show us the evil of our unbelief. Psalm

139:23-24 - Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

When we are anxious, it reveals that we are trusting in ourselves instead of in God. We are trusting ourselves to take care of the situation instead of relying upon God to do what is best for us and for His glory. 1 Peter 5:6-7 - Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you. Our issue is pride, so we need humility. When we don't believe God really cares or is in control, we are shutting ourselves off from His help. When we are anxious, we are trusting in ourselves instead of in God.

So when those anxious thoughts and fears creep into our minds, we must humble ourselves. We must recognize that we are in unbelief and do not think God is big enough to handle our situation. We then must cast those anxieties upon God. Throw them overboard like you were on a ship and let them sink to the bottom of the sea. Turn to God. Focus on His sovereign love and wisdom. Acknowledge that He is doing what is best for you and what will bring Him the most glory. Then thank Him for the opportunity to grow in your trust in Him. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

There is hope. These obsessive thoughts and behaviors are sinful patterns that we develop when we are depending on ourselves and not upon the Spirit. However, as we

look to Jesus the minute we have these anxious thoughts and as we ask the Holy Spirit to help us think rightly and then do what is right, God's power will enable us to break the sinful patterns of thoughts and behavior through His Spirit in us as believers. We will begin to respond according to God's Word and not according to our fleshly desires and habits. We can be set free in Christ. It does not happen overnight, but it will happen. And God will get the glory as you recognize He has done the work in you.

In summary, we learned that anxiety comes from responding to the uncertainties of life with a wrong view of God. Anxious thoughts cause you to focus on yourself and not on God who is sovereign over everything. And anxiety is a spiritual problem that needs a spiritual answer. When we are anxious, we are trusting in ourselves instead of God.

Furthermore, we looked at the downward spiral into anxious noise in your soul. This starts with uncertainty and doubts in your life. It progresses to discontentment with the unknowns of life. This then leads to covetousness. And in the processes of seeking certainty by your own effort and means to gain control, you can again fuel more uncertainty because you cannot control very much in comparison to God. Thus anxiety can spiral over and over.

Therefore, in response to anxious thoughts we need to humble ourselves, turn to God, believe His sovereign hand is at work, and pursue contentment in Him. Contentment will be the mark of Christian maturity. When we believe what God has said about Himself, contentment can be found.