

Adorn the Hidden Person of the Heart - Part 3

We have discussed how the immaterial affects the material part of us. In other words, how the pressures we experience in life - whether daily pressures or crises - take a toll on our physical bodies. We can have insomnia, fatigue, heart palpitations, stomach disorders, increased or decreased appetite. If those pressures aren't resolved, we can experience depression, lack of interest, irritability, irrational fears, panic attacks, compulsive behavior, and begin to withdraw from others or become quite difficult to be around.

God tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 - Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. We need to renew our minds with truth to withstand pressure with less effects on either our mind or our body. And we also help our situation by disciplining our body by getting enough rest, regular exercise and a nutritional diet. We must guard our hearts and care for our bodies. As we have said, a disciplined body is helpful, but a renewed mind is essential.

So we guard our hearts as we renew our minds through the study God's of Word, focusing on His truths and relying on the Holy Spirit. Then I am able to recognize the truth that God is more than enough for me in whatever circumstance I find myself. We must guard our hearts. But how can we do that?

Philippians 4:4-8 - Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say

it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. 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 your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things.

Because unbelief and discontentment are the seedbed of anxiety, then a right view of God and a right view of our uncertainties are at the heart of the solution. We need a renewed mind about who God is and what He has promised. Sounds simple, and it is. The Christian life is not easy, but it is simple. The Biblical solution to anxiety involves the need to pray right, think right and do right. As our verse for this weekend says in 1 Peter 3:6, we are Sarah's daughters if we do what is right and do not give way to fear.

So how do we pray right? Jim Berg says right praying is not "worrying online". It is not just dumping stuff on God. It is coming to a God Whom we see as more than enough. Prayer is both a reality check and a surrender check. The reality check entails understanding who God is. As we studied the last couple of years in Trusting God, He is sovereign, wise and loving.

Do I recognize that God loves me personally? In Jeremiah 31:3, God says He has loved us with an everlasting love and drawn us with lovingkindness. We are told in 1 Peter 5:7 to

cast all our anxieties on God because He cares for us. Do I know that God will wisely do what is best in my situation? Romans 11:33 - Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out! Do I come to God with the knowledge that He, in His power and sovereignty, will give me the grace to help in my time of need? 2 Corinthians 9:8 - And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. This is our reality and we are to focus on these truths about God as we come to Him in prayer. A good resource is Bret's book *Pray This Way* which we all received. Another resource is Don Whitney's *Praying the Bible*.

So prayer is a reality check, but it is also a surrender check. My attitude reveals my heart orientation. Am I willing to come to God on His terms where I confess my sins and surrender my desire to Him? Many of you will know 1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Am I willing to come to God for His glory and not just for my relief? This is a major surrender check. Paul talks about his thorn in his flesh in 2 Corinthians 12 and his plea for God to remove it. But God says in verse 9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." So Paul says he will therefore boast all the more gladly about his weaknesses so that Christ's power rests on him. When we come with a surrendered heart to God and want Him to be glorified in our situation, it changes our focus about the anxiety we are

experiencing.

Am I coming to God with thanksgiving because I trust that God in His love, sovereignty and wisdom will do what is best? Is there anticipation for God to work? Do I come away with peace that God in His love, sovereignty and wisdom will do what is best? Are we trusting God and His character such that we can be thankful and experience His peace in the storms of life?

If we only tell God what we are worried about, we can come away still fretful and anxious. That is why we need to follow our request with thanksgiving as we focus on God's faithfulness to us in the past. We thank Him for working all things for our good as Romans 8:28 says. We thank Him because He withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly in Psalm 84:11. We want to turn our sinful anxieties into a sanctifying work, and we know that God can deliver us from sinful temptations especially when we pray correctly and apply His Word.

Next, we need to think right. The word "anxious" in the Bible comes from a Greek word that means "to divide". A sinful care or sinful worry is something that divides our hearts and it places our attention on self rather than on God and His Word. We are double-minded when we worry, so we need to identify our thoughts of anxiety. What do your anxious thoughts look like?

Keep a running list of those "if only" and "what if" thoughts. Track your thinking, not your feelings. Add to your list any recurring thoughts of doubt and uncertainties. It's good to remind yourself that you are actually scaring yourself with your thoughts. Write down what those thoughts are and keep

a journal to track what times during the day or night you struggle most with thoughts of anxiety. The middle of the night seems to be prime time for me if I do not renew my mind with Scripture. Of course, that means I need to have Scripture memorized so that I can meditate on truth and reject those wrong thoughts. So write down those anxious thoughts, but then address them with Scripture. What does Scripture say about your particular anxious thought? If you can't find any verses, ask someone to help you find the truth that addresses the issue.

Now because God commands us in Isaiah 41:10 to fear not, and to be anxious for nothing in Philipians 4:6, then it is totally possible to obey His command with His help, even though it may be difficult at first. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 tells us to take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ. But how do we do that?

Our "enemy thoughts" can sometimes seem stuck in our minds to the point we feel as if we are being attacked. But these obsessive thoughts come from our repetition and concentration on the doubt or issue that is making us so anxious instead of God's Word. So if we are thinking about something over and over, our mind remembers it better. If we concentrate on something a lot, our mind becomes more imprinted with that thought. And if what we are thinking about causes strong emotions, then we are sure to remember it even more vividly. If you resonate with this issue, *Changing Your Thought Patterns* by George Sanchez is another resource available at church.

To break out of the habit of wrong thinking, we must use these same principles of repetition, concentration and strong

emotion to imprint believing thoughts in our mind. We must renew our mind with truth and refuse to think upon those enemy thoughts. We must turn our meditation on anxious thoughts into meditation on God's truth. That is how anxious thoughts gradually lose their hold upon us. One way to do this is to use STOP-Think cards to remind us what to do with our anxious thoughts. When you recognize an enemy thought, ask God to help you resist the temptation to meditate upon it. If you find you already are meditating upon it before you recognize it as an enemy thought, ask God's forgiveness for allowing that thought to become more real to you than the truths about God Himself.

We need to replace our enemy thoughts of anxiety with the truth of God's Word. Philippians 4:8 gives a checklist for how we are to think and what we are to think upon - things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report. And verse 9 tells us to practice these things. In the Psalms, David is a godly example of turning from his anxious thoughts due to his stressful situations. He would speak of his enemies or his loneliness. But then he would turn his thoughts to God's nature and God's promises. The result would be that he was soon praising God in the midst of his trials.

We have included on Page 13 truths about God and Scripture verses which is also on Page 48 of the study book. If you write those out on STOP-Think cards, you can pull them out when you find yourself beginning to focus on enemy thoughts and instead meditate on truth. In other words, renew your mind as God commands.

So we pray right, we think right, and then we do right.

We face our anxieties with God's help. 2 Timothy 1:7 - For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Psalm 56:3-4 - When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?

Then ask yourself, "What is really bothering me right now? What are the uncertainties or possibilities that I am meditating upon?" Pinpoint the issue. Then tell yourself the truth about God and what He has said about you. Replace those enemy thoughts of anxiety as we spoke about a minute ago.

Then the next step is fulfill your responsibilities with God's help no matter how you feel. Just as we are to track our thoughts, not our feelings, so we are not to let our feelings deter us from doing what is right. So ask yourself, "What would I be doing right now if I weren't so fearful?" Surrender to God to do what His will is right now and then do what you should be doing. James 4:17 tells us that whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Will this process be easy? No! It is hard. But there is no way out of the vicious cycle of anxiety except to face your fear and fulfill your responsibility with God's help. As you know Him and His character, you can trust Him to be with you in these difficult situations. God promises in Isaiah 43:2-5 - When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...Because you are precious in my eyes and

honored, and I love you...Fear not, for I am with you. Isaiah 26:3 - You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. So fulfill your responsibilities. Do what is right without fear today.

We also must stay connected to the body. If you are not already involved in a Titus 2 group, I would highly recommend that as a good place to start. When we are in the midst of stressful situations and anxieties, we can think no one understands what we are going through. No one will want to bear my burden with me. In our pride, we may not want to share our burden with others. But in humility, we need to reach out and seek help from others. There is nothing more encouraging than to know others are praying for us or to be the one praying for those in need.

There are so many passages you can memorize to renew your mind and encourage your heart with God's sovereignty, love and wisdom. In your study book, Sessions 7 through 11 cover attributes of God - love, mercy, faithfulness, power, wisdom - along with memory verses. This will give you courage to fulfill your responsibilities no matter how you feel. And remember courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is doing what is right in the midst of fear. Finally, along with guarding your heart, you need to care for your body. We can't forget the need to not only pray right, think right and do right. We also need to eat right, exercise right and rest right.

Does trusting God and not worrying mean that your physical symptoms will be totally removed? I have found in my case that my head knows what is truth when it comes to our uncertainty

about Bob's future with a possible recurrence of cancer, but when we are in the midst of testing every three months or in the hospital having procedures done to confirm there is nothing growing, my stomach still will be churning.

However, my mind is at rest. There is a settled confidence that God is doing what is best and I know He is in total control. I am able to sleep at night. I am not playing the "what if" game in my mind. But my stomach tells me something is up. Is that sin? I don't believe it is. I do know that it keeps me running to the Lord and rehearsing His goodness and faithfulness. I find myself growing and filled with joy and peace in the midst of the uncertainties of our lives. It turns it into a sanctifying work and not a sinful anxiety. Psalm 42:5 says, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God."

I think we all look forward to the day when there will be no fear or anxiety when Jesus rules in the new creation which will be at peace. But for now, Peter says in 2 Peter 1:2 - May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. He also says in 2 Peter 3:18 - But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Growth in our knowledge of God is the only solution to our anxious hearts. We have set the foundation for that knowledge of God through our retreats and fellowships together the last couple of years. So now we need to put those truths into action as we apply what we know about God to our thoughts. As we renew our minds with the Word and respond with our actions, we will

be like Sarah and do what is right without fear.

In conclusion, as we seek to battle anxiety, We need to pursue the right view of God and the uncertainties of our lives. We do this by praying rightly in submission to the Word of God, thinking rightly in alignment with the Word of God, and doing rightly in obedience to the Word of God. This process will help us meditate on truth and put to death the anxiety that comes from meditating on doubt and fear. Will you come to God on His terms surrendering all to Him and place your hope firmly on the work of Christ for you? I pray that you will, and that we can help each other as we pursue sanctification in the body of Christ.