

How to Handle Anxiety

1 Peter 5:6-7 (01/01/17)

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What a great passage for a New Year's Day sermon. There is lots of apprehension out there; worry and concern in the air. How will Mr. Trump handle the presidency? Will the economy roar or stall? Where will terrorists attack in 2017? These are macro anxieties. Luke 21:34 warns us: "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life." Beware of all the doomsday "prophets" who use fear of the future to get people to buy into their products. Since we don't know what 2017 holds, we'll just have to trust God about it!

Then there are the micro concerns in our lives and this is where most of us get ensnared. We find ourselves worrying about our health, our finances, the future, the weather. In Matthew 6:32-34 Jesus gives us counsel on how to deal with these worries. (1) God knows what you need, so stop worrying (6:32). (2) You have a much higher purpose than the stuff of this world – you have an eternal kingdom to live for today (6:33). (3) God designed you to live one day at a time (6:34).

Every day is a fresh new day to live for Christ, to live to please Him. Some people live in the past, not letting go of bad memories, regrets, resentments. Remember those station wagons that had rear seats that faced backward? You'd sit there looking at where you'd been. That's how many people live their lives – looking back at what happened to them. Other people are full of fears about what is coming tomorrow. Jerry Bridges says God has put a big curtain between you and your future. You can't know what's coming; however, you do know God is there! So live to please God today and give your yesterdays and tomorrows to your loving heavenly Father who promises to take care of you better than you can imagine.

We may as well admit it, though; worry is one of our favorite activities and we allow our minds to run rampant. You wake up at 3 o'clock in the morning with your mind gnawing like a dog on a bone about that person who stole your boyfriend, a marriage that's getting worse and worse, a child giving you fits, a job that you really hate, or a diagnosis you really didn't want to hear. "Oh no, why me, why this, why now? What did I do to deserve this?" Your heart-talk may sound like a practical atheist, as if God doesn't give a rip about what's going on in your life. And if we let these concerns dominate us, our spiritual lives can easily shrivel under all the mental distraction.

Now we're ready for 1 Peter 5:6-7. These are definitely two of my favorite verses. We need to memorize them and then use them regularly as we face the troubles that are part of living in a fallen world. Let's repeat it two times together and see if we've got it.

1 Peter 5:6-7 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7 casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

Before we open these verses, back up to verse 5b and remember two things.

First, God is the enemy of pride and proud people. Proud people don't think they need God, Christ, the Scriptures, or the cross to live their lives. Proud people are called fools in the Bible. Psalm 14:1 "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" They arrogantly think, "I don't want to think about God. I don't need God; I can manage on my own. I refuse to bow my knee to Christ, the cross, and God's grace."

Second, God is the friend and lover of the humble and pours grace into their lives. The humble are people whose hearts have been changed by God. They understand their desperate need of God's grace and they know they owe everything to God, physical and spiritual.

You may not be experiencing the life-transforming grace of God because you are unwilling to humble yourself under God's mighty hand. God does not pour grace into rebel hearts. Humble people are empty of self and needy of grace. Empty and needy. Think about those aerial refueling maneuvers. The pilot journeying through the skies finds his fuel gauge close to empty and submits to the tanker plane above and the needed fuel pours in. That's exactly what the humble person does. He brings himself under God and God pours in the spiritual fuel into his empty soul. Is that true about you?

Now we're ready for verses 6-7. There are two simple but powerful conditions here to experience God's grace pouring into and through our lives. Vs. 6 - Accept everything in your life right now as part of God's plan for you – BECAUSE IT IS! Vs. 7 - Trust God to take care of you regardless of what happens – BECAUSE HE WILL. These two verses go together. Humble yourself first, and then start casting. Before God will carry your burden, He wants your heart. Don't use God as a lucky charm without humbling your heart to Him. Humble yourself first, come under His sovereign and loving authority, and then cast your anxiety on Him.

Accept everything in your life right now as part of God's plan for you – BECAUSE IT IS!

Vs. 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time...

Humble yourself. This is the mark of God's people, always! Bring your life under God's authority. Be a learner under the troubles and trials in your life. See God in your situation.

Saul was not a learner; he was a rebel. He didn't wait on God but sacrificed before Samuel arrived, and it cost him big time – the kingship (1 Samuel 13:13-14).

David, a man after God's own heart, messed up too, but he was quick to humble his heart under God's mighty hand! He lived fully aware that he couldn't do anything; God was his fortress and strength! He humbled himself as he went out there to fight Goliath! "I come to you in the name of the God of Israel!" (1 Samuel 17:45-47).

Elijah humbled himself on Mt. Carmel! He knew his God; he knew God's power, that God was real! Baal didn't even exist, but Jehovah did. He is the true and living God and Elijah lived under His authority and the rain came (1 Kings 18:37).

What's the opposite of humbling? To resist, rebel, run away when things get rough, and look to the world for help. In 2 Kings 1 tells us of Ahaziah's deathly sickness. When he sent a servant to inquire of Baal-zebub, Elijah intercepted him with this great question, "Is there no God in Israel that you are going to this pagan god who doesn't even exist?" Are you running to dead gods and then claiming that God doesn't change your life? Check yourself. Could it be you have not really humbled yourself under His authority?

Under the mighty hand of God. What is God's mighty hand? This is not God's thumb, like He's got you pinned down. This is your heavenly Father's **sovereign, powerful, protecting, providing, personal, and present hand!** God's hand is His irresistible action in all human affairs. God is mighty and over all. Know and believe this high view of God! There isn't a molecule or moment that isn't under God's mighty hand! And for you as His people, this mighty hand is **His constant personal providence** over your life that you can be absolutely assured of.

God's mighty hand in your life means God is in control of every circumstance and person in your life. There's nothing in your life right now that God's mighty hand has not brought about. Believe this! We

must know our God and His sovereign control over all of life, including yours. Sweetly yield, surrender, and humble yourself under His providential hand. This is one of the most wonderful, awesome truths about God you can know.

So things may be going just swimmingly in your life right now – humble yourself under His mighty hand and be thankful. Or things may seem to be out of control in your life. They're not. Jerry Bridges' book *Is God Really in Control* should be required reading for every believer. Here's what he wrote, "If there is a single event in all of the universe that can occur outside of God's sovereign control, then we cannot trust Him." Here's the truth. God is really in control, not just of this universe, but of your personal, individual life! Do you believe that?

Also, know this. You can't ultimately resist God's mighty hand! God will fulfill His plan whether you humble yourself under His hand or not. But to resist and rebel against God's hand is the ultimate foolishness. It's like an ant trying to fight off an elephant.

That Pharisee was all full of himself, and his praying was his proud heart informing God of his own greatness. That publican over there was so humbled he couldn't even look to heaven; he just cried out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Guess who got the grace? The publican went home a new person!

What about you? What would possibly keep you from humbling yourself under God's mighty hand? Right now? Listen to that thief on the cross who humbled himself under God's mighty hand as he spoke to other thief on the cross, "We deserve our punishment, but He did nothing wrong. Lord, remember me when you enter your kingdom." God poured the grace into that dying soul! Jesus looked at Him and said, "This day you'll be with me in Paradise." No sweeter, more assuring words were ever spoken!

You may be humbled externally, brought to the end, near to death, suffering some great pain or tragedy. You may be broken emotionally by a hurtful relationship. You may have cried out to God from your distress, but your heart is not really humbled before God because your real desire is for God to do some magic for you, get the heat off. That's where biblical counseling often fails. When the pressure is off, the threat is over, and the sun is shining again, you may rise up in your old pride and self-confidence and ignore God because you don't think you need Him anymore. Or, you may have said, "Well, I tried to humble myself, I tried to see that God was in my marriage problems, but she never changed. It didn't work for me." How many say or think that, as if God is something you try like a new medication or a new doctor? This comes from a wrong, unscriptural view of God.

He will lift you up. On the other hand, you may feel you are really sinking here. And it may get worse. But God's hand is still there, over you. Believe this promise: He will lift you up! He'll lift you up at the proper time, and He determines when that will be. The Greek word "time" here is *kairos*, the name of a Greek god with a long tuft of hair sticking forward, representing the opportune time, the lucky time, grab it or you may miss it. For you and me, God's proper time has nothing to do with luck. God controls your days and years. He may let you go through some severe suffering and let you die, but He's still going to lift you up! Or He may take you through some troubles, some disease, some hardship, and, like Job, lift you up in this life. Ultimately, though, we know He'll lift every believer up to sit with Jesus at his right hand! Jesus promised that all who humble themselves will be exalted. Jesus Himself humbled Himself, even to the death of the cross. Easy? No. Jesus said, "If possible, let this cup pass. Nevertheless, not My will but Yours be done!" Did God lift Him up? Right out of that grace. A little later, right up into the Father's presence. You as a believer have this same hope. God, in His time, will lift you up. Count on that.

Trust God to take care of you regardless of what happens – BECAUSE HE WILL!

Vs 7 Casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

Now, having humbled yourself, accepting the glorious truth that God is sovereign over your life, there isn't a person or circumstance in your life that He hasn't brought about, the good, the bad, and the ugly, you want to honor Him with your life, you aren't rebelling or running away. Now God wants you to do some casting, throwing, hurling. And what you are casting is called anxiety. The Greek word literally means torn apart or frazzled, like your heart is going through a paper shredder. Your cares and worries and fears are distracting you from living your life for Christ in a joyful, peaceful, trusting way.

A Major Worrier Remember Martha in Luke 10? She was dealing with some serious worry. And Jesus lovingly reprimanded her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things." (Luke 10:41) How did all her worry affect her life? The same way our worries can affect us.

- She was **distracted** from the main guest – Jesus! The word distracted means all pulled around. You can just hear her in that kitchen banging the pots and pans so everyone knows how much she has to do! Here's a functional tip: When Jesus comes to your house, drop everything and go listen to Him.
- She got things all **out of perspective** – she was way too concerned about her meal and what others thought. "Will everyone like it? Will it turn out OK? What if I burn the roast?"
- She lost the sense of what's really **important** – only one thing is necessary, Christ Himself!
- She became **critical** of others – namely, her sister Mary. "She's not helping me." (vs. 40)
- She actually became **obnoxious** to Christ Himself asking, "Don't you care? Tell her to help me!"

So what's shredding your heart? What are your thoughts chewing on? What's fragmenting your mind? Anxiety could be warnings of hidden idols rather than God ruling your heart. Maybe money or relationships or your marriage or health or wanting to impress people may be the most important things to you, and since you can't control these things, you are worried about them. They fill your heart, consume your thoughts, and Christ is not ruling your heart. Instead of seeking first His kingdom, you're all concerned about your little kingdom. They may be memories from the past, vain regrets, or a resentment you are holding onto. They may be pressures of today, decisions you have to deal with right now and you just don't know what to do. Worry is like rocking in a rocking chair: lots of action but going nowhere. Maybe you have to give a public speech and you are plagued with worry. "What if they make fun of me, reject me, see how dumb I really am?" You may remember Stuart Scott who spoke with clarity and effectiveness at our Couples Advance. He tells about his horrible fears of speaking publicly. After really messing up his first trial message in preaching class, a professor approached him and asked, "What were you thinking about? You were thinking about yourself, weren't you?"

Some of your worries are matters within your control. You may be all anxious because you aren't being responsible in certain areas of your life. You've overspent and now the bills are coming in. You aren't handling conflicts well and now that broken relationship is really gnawing at you. You spent almost zero time studying for that test and now you're starting to choke up about failing it. You can't say, "Well, I'll just cast that care on God. He'll see me through." No, this isn't superstition or magic here. Don't use God to cover your laziness or carelessness. This is time for some serious repentance and evaluation of what your responsibilities really are and then get busy obeying God about them.

Learn to Cast Your Anxiety. Now, let's take every little and big care and bundle them all up into one care package. God says "all" your anxiety. It pictures every single thing that you worry about. So go gather all your anxiety, wrap it up into one care package, and ship it UPS, Unlimited Prayer Service to your heavenly Father. How do you do it? With two hands: Prayer and Trust. "Lord, I've been carrying all this junk around and it's done nothing but wear me down. Here it is, I'm putting it into Your hands!"

Your God Cares For You. Why hurl them into His hands? Ah, listen to this and work hard to believe it. You are a constant, every moment, here and now, concern to Him. No matter what you're going through, and He knows what you are dealing with, He cares for you. Just like a mother is concerned for her child and won't leave him out of her sight, your heavenly Father is sovereign and powerful and wise and loving and cares more about you than you'll ever know. He doesn't want you all frazzled and weighed down with fears and worries and anxieties. He wants you to know He cares and loves you and He is eternally committed to His glory and your good. Period! God said the same thing to His people in Psalm 55:22, "Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken." Cast the entire package on Him!

Let me ask you a question. Do you really believe that God is personally concerned about you? Do you believe God's mighty hand is a hand of sovereign love and care, and that there isn't a circumstance or person in your life that He hasn't planned to be there? As you walk down life's road, you will pick up cares and worries. There's much beyond your control. You can either let them weigh you down or you can give them to your Father who is walking down the same road with you every moment of every day! He said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Heb 13:5)

Martin Luther tells about how his wife, Kate, helped him with his worries and concerns.

At one time I was sorely vexed and tried by my own sinfulness, by the wickedness of the world, and by the dangers which beset the Church. One morning I saw my wife dressed in a black mourning dress. Surprised, I asked her who had died. She replied: "Do you not know? God in Heaven is dead." I said to her, "How can you talk such nonsense, Katie? How can God die? He is immortal and will live through all eternity." "Is that really true?" she asked. "Of course," I said, still not perceiving what she was aiming at. "How can you doubt it? As surely as there is a God in Heaven, so sure is it that He can never die." "And yet," she said, "though you do not doubt that, you are still so hopeless and discouraged." Then I observed what a wise woman my wife was, and mastered my sadness. (Referenced in Warren Wiersbe's Fifty People Every Christian Should Know, p. 14).