

Overcoming Anxiety (or A Tale of Three Cats)

Introduction

I want to talk about something that has been an issue in my life and seems to be a problem for a lot of people: overcoming anxiety.

The Problem

Our peace of mind is important to us. It's important to God also! Jesus is called, "the Prince of Peace." We read of all kinds of promises of peace in the scriptures. Jesus even says, "My peace I give unto you."

(These are not references to "world peace," or even necessarily peace with our neighbor, which can't be guaranteed. But rather, for the believer, peace in our hearts – freedom from anxiety.)

The problem is that many of us struggle with anxiety. I believe scripture teaches us how we can overcome anxiety.

[Read Matthew 6:25-33, attached]

Possible Ways We Can Approach the Question of Anxiety's Causes and Cures

It helps to divide the possible causes and their cures into 3 categories

- Physical – brain disorders, chemical imbalances, too much caffeine, the magnetic pull of the moon, etc.
- Knowledge – this is the idea that we're anxious because we lack knowledge or understanding
- Choices – we are anxious as a result of wrong choices.

How you try to cure your anxiety will depend on which of these, or combination of these, you think is the cause.

Physical Causes and Cures

1. Chemical stimulants are one example of a physical cause; if I drink too much coffee, I'm anxious about everything.
2. I have a friend who's a paranoid schizophrenic. He is very anxious, all the time; and has been for 30 years. When he takes his medicine, he's normal – it's like night and day.
3. People who are emotionally traumatized for long periods of time, or even a single severely traumatic event, can end up with altered brain chemistry.
4. If the cause of anxiety is physical, trying to correct the problem with education or correcting choices may be helpful, but you will be fighting an uphill battle and may never be completely successful.
5. We all may suffer from physical ailments such as these to one degree or another. Complete freedom may have to wait until we get our new perfect bodies in the resurrection.
6. Knowing that some part of our problem may have a physical cause may even relieve some anxiety, but we must make every effort to have it treated medically, and we mustn't ever use it as an excuse to sin.

Knowledge

1. For believers, gaining the proper perspective of the issues that we are anxious about will alleviate our anxiety.
 - a. The Christian views the source of problems in our lives and in the world to be primarily moral rather than epistemological – problems with our choices rather than with our knowledge. The humanist trusts in man's knowledge to cure man's ills.
 - b. Christians, however, still use our minds, but we open them up to God as the source of truth. That is what being "spiritual" is. It is not the rejection of anything physical, and refusing to use our minds, and to just wait for miraculous transformations and cures for all of our problems. But it is the recognition that God, who is a spirit, is the source of all that is physical, and is the source of truth, and has the right to rule our lives.
2. Jesus thought that understanding would help us with anxiety. This is evident from how he tries to persuade us of certain concepts in this passage.
3. God gives us the correct definition of "life" – **a relationship with God**.
 - a. "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. *Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*" (Matthew 6:25)
 - b. "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3)
 - c. God used this definition since the Garden when he said "...for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:17)
 - d. And when He gave the law He said, "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you **life and death**, blessings and curses. Now choose **life**, so that you and your children may **live**..." (Deuteronomy 30:19)
 - e. Two of our 3 cats are polar opposites when it comes to their attitudes toward food. Balloon is always anxious, wondering if I'll ever feed him again, though I'm consistent in feeding him. He'll follow me around meowing, and try to steer my feet toward the cupboard where his food is kept. When I put out his food he'll *run* to his bowl and start eating. Spike, on the other hand, never asks for food, won't even start eating until the other 2 cats are done, is always relaxed, and prefers sitting on my lap to eating. They've been this way for 10 years. They both get enough to eat, but one's miserable and the other's content.
4. Though much of God's law is intended to extend the length of our lives, it wasn't the highest priority.
5. Jesus died young, most of his Apostles died young, we could die at any time.
6. Extending our days to the utmost is not to be our first goal, but it often is so for the world.
7. By extension this would apply to all we do to secure our lives.
 - a. health obsession
 - b. securing our retirement income
 - c. medical insurance

- d. life insurance (security for our loved ones)
I saw a New York Life commercial where a woman asks, in a soothing voice, "If there were a shop in your town called, 'Peace of Mind,' would you pay it a visit?"
8. If Jesus' priorities and promises are true for us, they are true for others also.
- a. We may be willing to risk losing a job for the sake of righteousness when it means we'll have to trust God to sustain us, but if we have people depending on us we may not be so willing.
 - b. A close friend of mine was at a job he held for 9 years, managing 8 computer programmers. He was told to fire 2 of them because of budget cuts. He was told to lie on their annual reviews to justify their being let go. He is a man of the highest integrity and it was tearing him up because he is a Christian and went against everything grain in his body. I quoted this passage from Matthew 6 to him. He said, "I'm aware of that, and that may be easy for you to say, but I have 2 children that depend on me and losing this job is not a possibility." I told him "I'm sure Jesus imagined your situation when he spoke those words. And if it's true for you, it will be true for them also. I also told him that his kids depend on him to be a model of integrity. He quit a week later. That was over 5 years ago and he's been doing fine financially and is a much happier person.

Choices

1. When the cause of our anxiety isn't physical or from a lack of understanding, it's a result of our wrong choices.
2. To qualify for God's provision that Jesus talks about here, we must meet the condition of seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness. He says that food and clothing are problems for the Gentiles to worry about.
3. We have to *choose* to rely on God's provision and seek His kingdom and his righteousness *first*, even if it would appear to compromise our lives (That's "life" with a small "L").
 - a. Obey all known commandments.
 - b. Obey your conscience.
One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike *Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.* (Romans 14:5)
 - c. Obey the "still, small voice."
 - i. No need to get mystical.
 - ii. Be reasonable.
 - d. Obey the big life changes.
 - e. Do not obey the world.
 - f. Call no man "Father."
 - i. "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. (Matthew 23:9)
 - ii. Matthew 23:1-13
¹Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples,

²saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;
³therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.
⁴"They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.
⁵"But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.
⁶"They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues,
⁷and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.
⁸"But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.
⁹"Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.
¹⁰"Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.
¹¹"But the greatest among you shall be your servant.
¹²"Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.
¹³"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

4. Many of us are aware of these commands and promises, but we still don't trust God to provide for us. One explanation may be that we have reinforced our fears by not trusting God in the past. In our time of trial, we chickened out and provided for ourselves, reinforcing our belief that we have to help ourselves because God won't come through.

Our third cat, Francesca, was a very nervous kitten. When she saw one of us walking near her, she would get scared of being stepped on, and she'd run frantically, often running right under our feet, thus reinforcing her fear of being stepped on. It took a long time to help her get over this.

Different Combinations

Anxiety rooted in the physical, knowledge, and choices categories may occur alone or in any combination.

Be Anxious for Nothing

Jesus addressed the most important fears in the passage we just read. In Philippians, Paul helps us to overcome *all* anxiety.

[Read Philippians 4:6-7, attached]

1. Again, we have to choose to trust God with our problem. We have to *pray, make supplication, give thanks, let God know our requests.*

2. This time, the answer comes supernaturally. He doesn't say God will tell us how to solve our problem, give us an understanding of the situation that will give us peace, or take the problem away, but that "the peace of God *which surpasses all understanding* will guard our hearts and minds.

Believe the Love of God for You

Scriptural References

Matthew 6:25-33

²⁵"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

²⁶"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?"

²⁷"And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?"

²⁸"And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin,

²⁹yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

³⁰"But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!"

³¹"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'"

³²"For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

³³"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Philippians 4:6-7

⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

John 6:27-29

²⁷"Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."

²⁸Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"

²⁹Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

The Definition of Life

Galatians 3:21

Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart **life**, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

Ephesians 2:1-2

And you were **dead** in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Romans 6:13

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to **life**; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of **righteousness**.

Deuteronomy 30:15

See, I set before you today **life** and prosperity, **death** and destruction.

Deuteronomy 30:19

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you **life** and **death**, blessings and curses. Now choose **life**, so that you and your children may live

Genesis 2:17

but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely **die**."

Genesis 3:4

The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will **not die**!

*Peace***John 14:27**

Peace I leave with you; My **peace** I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

John 16:33

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have **peace**. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

*Conditional Provision***Proverbs 10:2-3**

Ill-gotten gains do not profit,

But righteousness delivers from death.

The Lord will not allow the righteous to hunger,

But He will reject the craving of the wicked.

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.