

Introduction

I recently had a conversation with a licensed counselor with over twenty-five years of experience. I asked him: ‘What’s the one main thing you see people for the most, whether they’re white or black, old or young, male or female?’ ‘That’s easy,’ he said. ‘Worry, anxiety and everything that goes with it. Depression, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder etc ...’

I wasn’t surprised at all. I’ve asked other counselors the same thing and received essentially the same answer. The statistics on anxiety and depression are overwhelming. Anxiety disorders are the most common in the world today.¹ One study showed that the rate of anxiety had doubled from 2013 to 2018.² A recent article in *The Atlantic* states: ‘Objective measures of anxiety and depression – such as eating disorders, self-harming behavior, and teen suicides – are sharply up over the past

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1. Vanessa Coppard-Queensland, ‘Globally, 1 in 13 Suffers from Anxiety,’ *Futurity* (September 5, 2012; accessed at <https://www.futurity.org/globally-1-in-13-suffers-from-anxiety/#:~:text=Anxiety%E2%80%94the%20most%20common%20of,be%20released%20later%20this%20year>).
 2. <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-mental-undergrads-idUKKCN1VJ25Z>

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decade.³ A psychologist at the University of California, Irvine, said ‘there are really important trends in anxiety, depression, and suicide that stop us in our tracks.’⁴ But even apart from the statistics, the amount of worry in our own lives is concerning.

At the outset I want to acknowledge that there is a type of concern that at times can seem similar to worry. There is a healthy, biblical, non-sinful way to be concerned about a situation or person. The clearest example of this would be the Lord Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was obviously very concerned about the fact that He was about to suffer the wrath of His Father for His people. And yet, Christ never sinned. He never crossed the line from legitimate concern into sinful worry. That’s not the case for the rest of humanity.

One of the clearest and repeated things the Bible tells us about worry is: Don’t. Don’t do it. It’s not worth it. It doesn’t work. And, oh yeah, by the way, it’s sin. And it’s not just a lighthearted, white collar, domesticated sin. It’s serious business. It’s deadly. It’ll ruin your life ... and your eternity if you let it.

Do you take worry that seriously? I’m afraid many of us don’t. Is that really what the Bible has to say about it? I believe it is.

Thank God that’s not all He tells us about worry! He is such a good and gracious Father. More than that, He is our great High Priest who has come and lived among us. He has suffered with us and for us. He fought the fight against worry with us and for us. He is our model of how to fight. He is also our Savior when we fall in the fight.

This short book is designed to help us understand worry all the way down to its roots and all the way up to its worst fruits. We want to see worry the way God does so that we can repent

3. Derek Thomas ‘Why American Teens Are So Sad,’ The Atlantic.com, April 11, 2022, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/newsletters/archive/2022/04/american-teens-sadness-depression-anxiety/629524>

4. Dispatches, *World*, May 21, 2022, 26.

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and by His grace be fully and finally free. We will never move past all sin and temptation in this life. But by the blood of Christ in our lives, we can and should see real progressive and sustainable victory over sin in our lives.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was probably the greatest preacher of the twentieth century. He was a medical doctor before he became a pastor. In a sermon on Ephesians 6:10-13 he made the following point: ‘We are strange creatures, made up of body, mind and spirit; these are interrelated and react upon one another. Many of our troubles in life are due to this fact, and to our failure to realize the place, function and sphere of each one of these realms. The devil, of course, takes full advantage of this, and attacks along this line.’⁵

He continues, ‘It is extremely difficult to define the limits of these three realms ... difficulty arises because of the borderline cases, which are not easy to classify ... Many Christian people, in fact, are in utter ignorance concerning this realm where the borderlines between the physical, psychological and spiritual meet ... Ignorance underlies this confusion, but the devil takes advantage.’⁶ The ignorance and confusion that he speaks of certainly come into play in dealing with anxiety. Our physical bodies can play a role in how often we feel worried. Our psychological state of mind definitely factors into this fight against fear. One example will suffice.

A recent article in *World Magazine* discussed how the terrorist attacks of 9/11 have effected an entire generation. One individual who struggles with anxiety interviewed for the article and stated: ‘Is that genetics? Maybe ... But 9/11 made me feel fear in almost every area where I didn’t feel it before.’⁷ The article later discussed how our brains’ chemistry can effect

5. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003) 206.

6. *Ibid.*, 207-209.

7. Emily Belz, ‘Generation 9/11’, *World*, September 11, 2021, 50.

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stress. ‘Trauma makes the amygdala, the brain’s threat detector, more sensitive. Under stress, the brain jumps quickly to one of four threat response modes: fight, flight, freeze, or faint.’⁸ This book only intends to address the spiritual realities that underlie this fight. My goal is to focus on the sin that surrounds our struggle with worry. The physical and psychological issues are certainly affected by and entangled with our spiritual struggle. But I do not intend to address all of the factors that arise from the physical and psychological side. Neither do I want to downplay their reality.

This book is not designed to diagnose whether or not you or someone you love needs to be on anxiety medication. Medicine is not sinful. Sometimes there are chemical imbalances in our brains that complicate our struggle with worry that can be effectively addressed with modern medicine. To make that determination, you ultimately need to see a wise doctor whom you trust. I’d also advise you to see a pastor and a Christian counselor to help make that decision as well. Even so, medicine alone will never cure any of us of sin. Sin must be ultimately addressed by the Word, grace and Spirit of Christ.

Even if you genuinely believe you need anxiety medication, I wouldn’t start there. For many of us, probably even most of us, worry is primarily a sin issue. It’s more of a sin and less of a sickness. I would encourage you to start with God, the Word and prayer before you just run straight to the latest pharmaceuticals.

Anxiety has been a problem for thousands of years. How did people address worry in ancient Israel? Maybe there’s something we can learn from the Creator of the universe and the Creator of our minds and bodies. Maybe He knows us better than we know ourselves. Maybe God has promised to give us all we need for life and godliness via His Spirit, His Word and His people. Maybe we should start there.

8. Ibid., 52.

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I invite you to come on this journey with me. Be honest with yourself and others. (This book would be best read and discussed with a group.) Also, I've preached a series of sermons on this topic that may be helpful to listen to as you read the book. If you would like to access the sermons they can be found at the link below.⁹ Identify your sin. Then kill it with God's grace and help, and enjoy the newfound peace, confidence and joy that will come.

While the above statement is true it can be misleading. Unfortunately, sanctification is rarely a linear process. It is often a roller coaster ride with high highs and low lows. Often it is two steps forward and then one step back. Faithful perseverance is required in the highs, the lows and all the mundane space in between. There will be seasons of great joy interlaced with seasons of great pain, suffering, confusion, sorrow and questioning.

True biblical faith isn't a faith that always feels triumphant. It is not a presumptuous faith that assumes the fight against sin will be quick and easy. It is a faith that looks past the worst circumstances to the one true God who is still on His throne ruling all things for our good. It is the faith that can say, 'I have no clue what God is going to do in the short run, but I know that He loves me and will eventually work all things for my good' (See Rom. 8:28). Faith built on the unchanging foundation of God's loving character is the faith that will carry you through the mountains and valleys of any struggle you may have. (See Isa. 38:14 as an example of such faith).

At times, some of these chapters may seem a little bit repetitive. There's an intentional reason for that. The Bible is often repetitive. Our Heavenly Father is all wise. He knows our frame, how weak and frail and fragile and fickle we are. He knows that we need many loving reminders. He is faithful to give us what we need. Notice Paul's wisdom on this point from

9. <https://gospeltalk.podbean.com/category/worry/>

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Philippians 3:1b: 'To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.' Paul knows that for Christians to hear the same truths repeated can be an important safeguard against the onslaught of sin and temptation we face daily.

In our fight with any sin and especially worry, we need to hear the same truth over and over again. The goal of this book is to influence the way you naturally think about fighting worry on a daily basis. Ideally, it will help to train you to think and pray on a daily basis with a deep foundation in His Word.

I cannot tell you how many times I meet with someone who is struggling with some sin, be it worry or something else. I will often ask them, 'How is your personal time alone with the Lord? How often are you meditating on His Word and praying? Are you asking God to help you and worshiping Him on a daily basis?' Oftentimes the answer is, 'Terrible. I rarely do. I have gotten out of the habit.' I usually respond with a smile, 'You might want to try that. I'm not saying it will solve all your problems instantly. But I bet it will make a significant difference!'

I am not saying that personal time with the Lord each day in the Word and prayer is a magic bullet guaranteed to fix all of your problems in life. It isn't. But, it might be the closest thing we have to a magic bullet to address our daily struggle with sin, whether that be worry or other struggles. I encourage you to take the truths, principles and examples found in this book and try to incorporate them into your daily time of prayer, meditation and worship. I think that if you do it might very well be life-changing and freeing!

Hopefully, working through this book will enable you to take real practical steps forward. Remember this: God is more committed to your growth, happiness and holiness than you are. You can trust Him. By grace, be faithful to do your part. But the main thing is to rely on Him. Rest in Him to do all the parts you cannot do.