

Anxious

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Date: 21 November 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. As Alistair said, my name is Archie. I'm the pastor in training here and I'm feeling slightly anxious, so let's pray. Heavenly Father, I pray that you would still our hearts this evening.

Would you be present amongst us by your Holy Spirit, helping us to understand your word and helping us to apply your word to our lives today.

We pray in Jesus' name. I wonder, what are you most anxious about?

This evening, what worries did you bring with you through that door on your way into church? It was COP26 just last week, wasn't it?

And we're all told at the moment, aren't we, that we should be really worried about the future of our planet. Here are some quotes from COP26. It's code red for humanity.

[1 : 03] The alarm bells are ringing. We're dangerously close to spiraling out of control. We're told, aren't we, that if we don't act now, it could spell real trouble, like world-ending, catastrophic trouble.

That may well be true. Are you worried about it? Maybe it's COVID. As you look back over the last 18 months, have you been worried?

Are you maybe even worried now about rising COVID cases, about vaccines, about lockdowns?

Have you been worried about coming back to church?

Maybe you're not really worried about those things at all. In fact, maybe you're more worried that we're being lied to, or at least that this climate change thing or the COVID pandemic are not nearly as worrying as the trajectory of our culture.

Worried that the emphasis is all wrong. Worried about overreaching governments. Worried that the church isn't doing enough. Worried about the waning Christian influence in our country.

[2 : 10] What are you worried about? We're not here this evening to talk about climate change or COVID or our culture. Instead, this evening we're going to be thinking about anxiety and about worry.

And we're going to look and we're going to see what the Bible has to say to us in our anxiety. I just want to say before we dive into that, I'm aware that there are those here, maybe those listening to this, who might have been diagnosed by their doctor with anxiety.

And I want to say that none of what we talk about this evening is intended to be a substitute for that. If you're here this evening and you suffer from panic attacks or uncontrollable phobias, post-traumatic stress, debilitating social anxiety, anything like that, maybe if you haven't spoken to a doctor, can I encourage you that it might be important that you do.

Sometimes as Christians, we need to rely on medical help and that's totally okay. And so let me encourage you, if you are in that position, do go and do that. Having said that, I do also believe that the Bible has something to say to all of us in our anxiety and in our worries of our lives.

Because we all, I think, don't we know the feeling? Maybe you'll hear this evening, are you a student or a teenager? And this used to annoy me so much, constantly being asked, what's next?

[3 : 33] What do you want to do with your life? Or maybe, again, I found this annoying, my own fault, but maybe you're behind on your coursework. Or you're worried about upcoming exams.

Maybe you're at work and the workload is just more than you can bear.

You've no idea how you're going to get through this week. Or you're looking ahead to a meeting, maybe even tomorrow, with colleagues that you just don't know how you're going to deal with it. I wonder if you've ever been invited to a party where you know that you're not going to know anyone. You're terrified it's going to be super awkward. We know the feeling, don't we? Maybe even as you walk into church, if you've ever walked into a church on your own, it might even be your own church, and yet we look around, don't we, trying to see someone that we might be able to sit next

to.

How does that make us feel? In so many ways, and these are all very different scenarios, but the feeling is familiar. I think it'll look different for all of us.

Different things might trigger it for all of us. But that feeling, you know it. Sweaty palms, increased heart rate, mind racing from one possible catastrophic outcome to the next.

[4 : 45] That sinking, nauseating feeling in the pit of your stomach. It's anxiety as we worry about the future. And so when we're feeling like that, and as we prepare for when we do feel like that, what does the Bible have to say to us?

We're not going to spend time asking what the Bible says about anxiety. Instead, we're simply going to walk through Psalm 31 together that we've just had read for us, and we're going to see what the Bible has to say to us in our anxiety.

We're going to let this Psalm be a balm to our worried and anxious hearts. Why are we going towards the Psalms here?

Well, you'll notice in this Psalm that it's a Psalm of David. That almost certainly means that David wrote it. And we don't know exactly when David wrote this Psalm, because he was just so often in that sort of anxiety-inducing trouble that this Psalm was clearly written out of.

And there's so much that we can learn from this Psalm in our anxiety. Three big things I think that this Psalm says to us in our anxiety. We can call on God confidently in verses 1 to 8.

[5 : 59] We can talk to God truthfully in verses 9 to 18. And we can trust God totally in verses 19 to 24.

Call on God confidently, talk to God truthfully, and trust in God totally. Firstly, then, we can call on God confidently, knowing that he alone is powerful.

Have a look at the end of verse 1 with me. Deliver me, David prays, in your righteousness. This is a bold prayer. It's a prayer that David knows only God can answer.

Why? Because David cannot deliver himself, because he knows that he is not righteous. Even in this Psalm, in verse 10, the word that we have in verse 10, translated afflictions, it carries this idea of iniquities, of sin, of unrighteousness.

David knows that he's got to rely on God's righteousness for his eternal deliverance. What a place to start. This is salvation by faith. Maybe you're here this evening, or you're listening to this, and your anxieties and your worries are significantly existential.

[7 : 17] Worrying, perhaps, about what happens when you die. Worried about whether you're good enough, about whether you've done enough to satisfy a perfect God.

Well, let me tell you that you haven't. That you can't do enough. Because the benchmark is perfection.

But the good news, if you've been in this church at all, you'll know that the good news is that God has made a way to satisfy his perfect justice. He's made a way for you to know him forever, because Jesus took the penalty of our unrighteousness, which means that if we trust in his righteousness, we can live with him forever, which means that we can start tonight by being confident about our eternal relationship with God.

It's by faith that we can call on God confidently to deliver us eternally. Just as it's by faith that David, see in verse 2, he calls on God.

Turn your ear to me. Come quickly to my rescue. Be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Turn your ear to me.

[8 : 32] Think perhaps of someone very ill in bed, a person too weak to speak. And so to hear the whispered words, you need to lower your ear to them. See, in our weakest moments, when we are crippled by fear and anxiety, when we can barely think or speak, our God lowers his ear to us to hear our even whispered requests.

And so for David, as he whispers, his words are calling confidently for rescue. Down in verse 21, David describes himself as in a city under siege.

And yet here he's calling for God to be his strong fortress. But more than that, because in verse 3, he confidently proclaims, you are my rock and my fortress.

He asks in verse 2 for something that he knows in verse 3 is already true. And we can do that too. Isn't that wonderful? To pray God's promises to us back to him, to call on him confidently in that way.

Then in verse 5, we get some potentially familiar words. Into your hands, I commit my spirit. These are the words, aren't they, of Jesus as he breathes his last on the cross.

[10:02] We saw actually just this summer in Acts chapter 7, that they were also the words of Stephen, as he was stoned to death. And I don't know about you, but when I've read those words in the past in the Old Testament, I've always sort of, and definitely wrongly, thought of them as a sort of weak resignation.

But do you see how those words are followed here in this psalm? You see, David knows, Jesus knew, Stephen knew, that God will deliver him, for he is Lord.

You see that's in capitals. He is Yahweh. It's the covenant name of the God of Israel, the God who has proved himself to be faithful in their history.

And so David calls, confident that he will continue to be faithful. In verse 6, it's only this God who is faithful.

See, David hates those who cling to worthless idols. Instead, he trusts this God, this God who knows him intimately in verse 7.

[11:14] He has seen his affliction and the anguish of his soul. Friends, whatever it is that you're facing, whatever worries you've brought here with you this evening, God sees you.

He knows what you're worrying about. He knows the deepest anguish of your soul. And he loves you. He really loves you.

For David, for David, in verse 8, he has set his feet in a spacious place. I think that just means giving him freedom and security and safety, significantly confidence in his relationship with God. And so knowing that this is what God has done for him, he can call on God confidently. And we can do the same. The temptation, I think, in our anxiety, certainly for me, is to numb the pain of our worries, to drown it out with whatever distractions suit us best.

For me, it often looks like bingeing the latest Netflix series, or going and spending a couple of hours in the gym, or being busy, busy even with good church ministry things.

[12:29] I wonder what it is for you. Not necessarily inherently bad things, but they offer no real comfort.

Whatever it is that we turn to, just like the idols of verse 6 in this psalm, they might numb the pain for a little while, but all they're really able to do is distract us.

And so instead, would we call on our God confidently, the only one who is really able to help, the one who gives us strength in our suffering, would we pray?

And would we pray like David, confidently, save me, because you have saved me. Be my refuge, because you are my refuge.

1 Peter chapter 5 verse 7 says this, cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. So often feels like the last thing that we want to do with our anxieties, and our worries, and our fear.

[13:41] But he knows us. He cares for us. He knows what we're facing. And so would we call on him? Would we turn our cares into prayers?

Because as Sinclair Ferguson writes, anxiety cannot continue to breathe easily in an atmosphere suffused with prayer.

He's very articulate, Sinclair Ferguson. I had no idea what suffused meant, but according to Google, it simply means covered. Would we suffocate our anxiety and our worry with prayer?

Suffocate it, confident that God is faithful, confident that God is a safe refuge in the storms of our lives.

We can call on God confidently. We can also talk to God truthfully in verses 9 to 18. Do you see how honest David is in these verses, verses 9 to 10?

[14:41] David isn't holding back here.

He tells God exactly how he feels. It's not that God doesn't know how he feels. We've just seen that God knows exactly David's pain, that he sees and that he cares.

And yet David speaks specifically here. He's detailing exactly how he feels. He talks to God truthfully. But this isn't just about the way that David feels.

Because in verse 11, he also begins to tell God about his circumstances, the enemies that have caused people to flee from him, even his neighbors and friends want nothing to do with him.

Forgotten in verse 12, as though he were dead, discarded like a piece of broken pottery, like you've just smashed a mug on the kitchen floor, straight in the bin.

[15 : 55] These friends, they whisper and plot against him. Again, it's not as though God doesn't know all of this. And yet David talks to him truthfully about what is going on in his life.

He speaks specifically about all of his circumstances. And so it's worth asking ourselves, in our anxieties and our worries, do we do the same?

We've already said, haven't we, that we can call on God confidently, that we've just got to get praying. But when we do, are we honest with him? Do we talk to God truthfully about how we feel? Do we speak specifically about our circumstances? What we're learning here is godly lament, not simply a good grumble, but an honest complaint to the only one who has the power to help. In Philippians chapter four, verse six, Paul says, do not be anxious about anything. But in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

[17 : 04] Again, would we turn our cares into prayers? Friends, there's nothing we can't take to our God. No pain too painful for his love.

No sin too sinful for his grace. No situation too trivial for his care. He loves you. He wants you to talk to him truthfully about how you feel and about your circumstances.

Having talked to God truthfully about his situation, David actually then goes on to talk to God truthfully about what he'd like God to do in his situation. Check out verse 14 and the start of verse 15.

I love this. David trusts God. Again, this is the Yahweh covenant name for a faithful God. He trusts him because of what he has already done, but he also knows God.

Do you see that? You are my God. God. This is not some impersonal pie in the sky kind of God. This is a God who knows and who desires to be known.

[18 : 15] But more than that, this loving personal God has David's times in his hands. My times are in your hands. In other words, he is in control.

I find that so comforting. Isn't that so comforting to know both of these things to be true? Imagine if our God was only one of these things and not the other.

We often think like that, don't we? Imagine if we had a loving God who wasn't in control, desperately wanting our best, but unable to help. Or a God who was absolutely in control, but who didn't love us and so was unwilling to help.

Friends, we need to know this evening that God is a loving, faithful God. that even when we feel completely out of control, he is in control.

And so whatever I am anxious about, whatever worries I bring through the door, I can trust this God. God who knows and is involved in every step that David takes.

[19 : 20] And so David can talk to him truthfully about what he'd like him to do. And what is that? In the rest of verse 15 and following, deliver me from the hands of my enemies.

He wants God to physically rescue him from his enemies. He then echoes the priestly blessing from Numbers chapter six. Let your face shine on your servant.

He wants to know God's presence, just like he knows the sun shining on his face. And in verses 17 and 18, what does he want? Well, he says, let me not be put to shame.

Let the wicked be put to shame. Being put to shame here, it carries the idea of hopes being deflated like a burst balloon. Instead of that, David wants his trust in God to be proven effective.

And for the wicked who trust in idols to be let down in their false hope. Let their lying lips be silenced, he says.

[20 : 25] He wants them to face God's judgment. For them to be silent in the realm of the dead. Sometimes we can find that language quite difficult, can't we? There's lots that we could say about this sort of cursing enemies in the Psalms.

You may well have come across it before. But I think for now, it's just important to notice that David isn't seeking to execute justice and judgment himself. He's simply telling God truthfully that he'd like God to deal with the wicked justly.

He's just coming to God truthfully with his anxiety, I think. And why does he want God to do that? Well, again, he talks to God at the end of verse 18, For with pride and contempt they, that is his enemies, speak arrogantly against the righteous.

Again, David is speaking so specifically to God here, telling him exactly what is affecting him and asking him to step in. And so for us, would we make room for this sort of prayer?

Very often we're told that the answer to suffering and anxiety and worry in this life is simply to get excited about that future where there is no suffering, to praise God for all he's done in Jesus,

making a way for us to live forever in a place where anxiety and worry is done away with.

[21 : 48] We're told, aren't we, to simply meditate on that glorious future and allow then the pains of this world to fade into insignificance. What are we saying this morning? Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Look full on his wonderful face and the things of the world. That's how worries and our anxieties will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

And that glorious future is true. It's definitely a great thing to think about, an eternity and a personal relationship that we should take great joy in.

But we should not emphasize that future at the expense of this, giving a voice to the hurting today, allowing ourselves to come to God, to experience that personal relationship, to be able to talk to him truthfully about how we feel, to be able to speak specifically about what is making us anxious and asking him to step in, to take our time in his hands, as we know that he already has.

Friends, we can call on God confidently and we can talk to him truthfully. And finally, we can trust him totally. In verses 19 to 24.

[23 : 12] I think the tone of the psalm shifts at this point. Whereas David before has clearly been very anxious, calling on God and telling him about his anxieties, there seems to be a shift in these verses to a sense of contentment.

And not because God has waved a magic wand and all of David's troubles have disappeared. We know that David faced enemies right up to his dying day. And yet in verse 19, David praises God. How abundant are the good things that you have stored up for those who fear you. Them you bestow in the sight of all on those who take refuge in you.

David trusts in God totally, knowing that through him, David has everything that he could possibly need. And he knows that he is a refuge for an anxious soul.

We had Matthew chapter 6 read for us just at the start of our service. A wonderful encouragement not to be anxious. Why? Because if God gives plants and birds all that they need, how much more can we, made in God's image, trust that he will give us all that we need?

[24 : 25] That he is sufficient. And so seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Seeking him for he is in Psalm 31 a refuge.

In verse 20, a refuge where God's people can hide from human intrigues. From the plots of men as other translations perhaps more helpfully have it.

Where God's people will be kept safe from accusing tongues. Because in verse 21, he showed me the wonders of his love when I was in a city under siege.

Because even when David was most anxious, I mean imagine being in a city under siege. Can you hear the thud, thud, thud of the battering ram on the gates?

And the whiz of the arrows in the air. I mean I just can't imagine something as more anxiety inducing than that. And yet in that place, having called on God confidently, having told him truthfully, David knows God's love.

[25 : 30] Even in that place. And so now whatever he faces, he can trust in God totally. And he can praise him properly. See in verse 23 and 24, he even asked God's people to join him in that praise.

Love the Lord, all his faithful people. The Lord preserves those who are true to him. But the proud he pays back in full. Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.

Trust in the Lord totally, he says, and praise in him properly. For he preserves his people, even through and in their anxieties. He keeps his people strong and he is where hope is found.

Trust in him totally. And in that, so praise him. I wonder how we're doing at this, praising God for deliverance in this way.

Not just praising God for our eternal deliverance from sin, though that is a very good thing to do. But when we find ourselves delivered from our worries and our anxieties or any other small thing in life, or even a bigger thing in life, when God graciously moves us from worry to contentment in him, how often do we turn to him and praise him specifically for that?

[26 : 51] And perhaps most important of all, as we finish this evening, I wonder if you are trusting in God totally. Do we really believe that he is completely sufficient, that he is all that we need, in all of our anxiety?

Do we trust that God has our times in his hands? Friends, if everything else was stripped away, if God was all that we had left, do we know this evening that he would be more than enough?

For he is absolutely sufficient. Sufficient to carry us in and through our anxiety. And of course, he is ultimately sufficient to save us unto eternity.

And so, whether you're here this evening and you're worried about COVID cases rising, or you're worried about overreaching governments, whether you're worried about climate change, you're worried that the emphasis is all wrong, whatever your Monday looks like, in all the anxieties of life, in all our worries about the future, as our heart rate increases, as our palms begin to sweat, as we feel that heavy, nauseating feeling in our stomachs, would we call on our God confidently?

Would we talk to him truthfully? And would we trust in him totally? Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, I pray that whatever we have walked through the door with this evening, whatever worries we face, whatever anxieties we harbor, would I pray that we would seek refuge in you?

[28 : 58] Would you be our refuge, even as we know that you are our refuge? Lord, would you help us, even when we barely know what to think, let alone speak, would you help us to call on you with confidence, knowing that our salvation is secure in Christ, Lord, would you help us to come to you honestly, and truthfully, to talk to you about every little circumstance of our life, though we know that you already know it.

Would you help us to understand how much you care, and how much you love us? And Lord, as we look to the cross, and as we see what you have already done for us, would you help us to trust you totally this evening?

Amen. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.