

Anxiety

June 10-11, 2017

My name is Andrew, and I'm one of the pastors here. If this is your first time at Crossroads, I am so glad that you are here today!

Each of us deals with anxiety on some level. Whether it's frequently or infrequently, there are concerns, worries, and fears that cause us to feel anxious. Several years ago, I was very anxious about a certain lunch meeting. At the time, my wife, Lauren, and I were still dating, and my lunch appointment was with Lauren's dad, Bob. He and I are good friends; we get together regularly for lunch, but this was a different lunch meeting. This was the day I was going to ask for his permission and blessing to propose to Lauren. And I was anxious!

During the drive, I rehearsed my speech, "Sir, I am in love with your daughter." No, no, no, that sounds too forward. "Bob, Can I call you Dad?" No, no, too soon. My hands were sweaty, my heart was pounding, and my mouth felt full of cotton balls. When we sat down to eat, I didn't have an appetite and I'm sure that Bob noticed I was not eating. Eventually, I summoned the courage to share what was on my heart. We had a great meeting; Bob was very happy, and it all worked out. Walking away from that lunch I felt like I was floating on a cloud...until I realized that I had to plan a proposal! And the feelings of anxiety started all over again!

Anxiety results from trying to control something out of our control.

I was anxious about my lunch meeting because I couldn't control Bob's response. Anxiety may present itself to us at work or at school or in our relationships; whatever the case, much anxiety comes from trying to control that which is beyond our control. Anxiety may come from worrying about what others think about us. It may come from life's "what if" questions: What if I don't marry? What if I don't have kids? What if I never get that perfect job? These come from worrying about something that we can't control.

A verse in the Bible says...***"Anxiety weighs down the heart."*** **Proverbs 12:25** I can't agree more! Anxiety feels like a weight. That story about my father-in-law is humorous. But I think most of us can agree that sometimes anxiety can be a lot more serious and very heavy. It's a burden that we carry in our hearts and minds. We feel its symptoms in our chest, our shoulders and churning stomachs. This weight is heavy.

Sometimes we try to label our anxiety - "I'm okay; it's just **stress.**" Or "I'm fine; I'm just **concerned.**" or "Things will be better when I'm less **busy.**"

What anxieties are weighing on you?

- Maybe you just graduated high school and have anxiety about your future.
- Maybe you're a parent of a graduate, and you feel some anxiety.
- Maybe you've had a career change or lost a job.
- Perhaps there's friction in a personal relationship that is eating at your emotions.

I recognize that some individuals face the challenges of serious anxiety disorders and health issues. Many find solutions by seeking treatment from a health professional and even appropriate medication. Today, I am not suggesting that someone ignore professional help for those specific issues.

I am suggesting that, today, we can find hope for anxiety. I wish that I could offer "10 steps" to living a life free of anxiety, but I can't. Anxiety is a part of being human. My hope is that we can find some perspective and use the practical tools that God offers us so that we can manage anxiety. The Bible says, "*Cast all your anxieties on him [God] because he cares for you.*" **1 Peter 5:7** This verse was written during the first century by Peter, one of Jesus' friends and followers. When Peter wrote these words, he was using the Greek language. The word he used for **anxiety** can also be translated as "**distraction.**" Isn't that what anxiety is? It's a distraction. It robs our attention and focus and emotional concentration. Anxiety forces us to spend a lot of energy worrying about the "what if's" and trying to control things beyond our control.

There are some Myths that anxiety tells us in order to distract us into thinking we can control things beyond our control.

ANXIETY MYTH #1: MORE MONEY FOR MORE CONTROL.

I think that many of us have heard this myth on some levels.

- If only I had more money, I wouldn't worry so much.
- If I had more money, I could spend more time with my family.
- If I could get that promotion or that perfect job, life would be easier.

I recently spoke to a Crossroader who is a business professional in the sales field. He told me that early in his career he felt the overwhelming pressure and anxiety of trying to keep up with competition and make the sale. He said, "I was afraid of failing and coming home to tell my family I couldn't do the job." This myth distracts us from God. We become focused on getting more money and resources. Between the great

depression of the 1930's and the 2008 Recession, history has shown that money does not provide security - only the illusion of security.

ANXIETY MYTH #2: PERFECT PLAN FOR A PERFECT LIFE.

This myth plays on our fears about the future. During the first year of being married, everyone asks, "How's married life?" "How's the honeymoon season?" Questions like that are common. After about a year, those questions stop, but a new question emerges. It's a scary question. I loathe this question... "When are you going to have kids?!" AGHH! I hate that question. That question gives me anxiety and nightmares! I'm still learning how to be a husband. I don't need the anxiety of thinking about Andy Jr. running around the house crying and having to change diapers! This second anxiety myth preys on parents of young children. It will tempt you to try and *control* their situations - who their friends are, their activities, and their grades.

This myth also haunts young singles. **I received this text from a college student...**

"I worry a lot about being alone and unsuccessful....wondering if I will get a good job that I don't hate; will I make enough money; also living independently from my parents soon. Wondering if I will ever find the right spouse before it's too late that is God's right match for me. Anxiety feels like you are drowning. But Jesus is my lifeline. He reminds me, in the midst of gut wrenching worry and doubt, he has taken care of me."

ANXIETY MYTH #3: LOOK BETTER TO BE BETTER

We live in a filtered culture. Everyday I work with teenagers, and have watched teens stage and take multiple photos of themselves - getting the right candid angle - and spend copious amounts of time editing a photo before posting to Instagram. This myth creates the illusion of control. If I can't control my life circumstances, at least I control my pictures and social-media identity.

Self-image can consume us.

- Getting a better car.
- Taking a better vacation.
- Going to a better college.
- Eating at a better restaurant.

This myth lies to us: "If we look better, we will *be* better."

Does it ever feel like anxiety is sticking to you? Like it's clinging to your heart - distracting you from God's purposes? I've asked Bob to help me illustrate this lesson. Bob is a typical adult just like you and me, but anxiety is sticking to him. Bob goes through his normal day and small pieces of anxiety stick to him just like these pieces of duct tape.

- Maybe he has a performance review at work or a meeting to discuss productivity.
- He has financial anxiety - a mortgage, utilities and car payments.
- There's anxiety about his kids - coaching sports, attending recitals, conferences at school.
- There are some projects at home that he keeps putting off.
- Maybe one of his parents has a health concern, and he feels the pressure to be the rock for the family.
- And there are the friends who tell him he needs to relax, and that stresses him out more.

Is anxiety sticking on you right now? Is it heavy? Do you feel the pressure? Is this duct tape a symbol of how your heart feels? Remember, that word *anxiety* can also mean *distraction*. So here's Bob, with all this anxiety, and, to deal with it, he tries to distract himself.

(hands Bob some objects...)

- *(remote)* When he gets home, he turns on the TV (not the news, that's more anxiety) but maybe sports or reality TV show to distract himself.
- *(coffee cup)* The family has evening activities, so he needs more caffeine to keep up. Maybe he can get some more work done after the kids go to sleep.
- *(cell phone)* He might be nervous about missing an important email from work, so he keeps his smartphone close - constantly checking and refreshing his inbox.

Before we know it, Bob is sleep-deprived, hooked on caffeine, and paranoid about not letting anyone down. He's weighed down by anxiety and distracted. How can he receive *more* from his Heavenly Father if his hands are full?

- Maybe God is prompting...“Come join a small group.” He can't; his hands are full.
- God might be saying, “Come spend time with me in reading the Bible.” He can't; He has to get these emails out.
- God might be trying to grow his marriage...“It's been awhile since you and your spouse spent time alone.” He can't; the bills have to get paid.

Soon, Bob is so distracted, that God's voice gets drowned out by the anxiety sticking to him. God wants to take you to new places spiritually, transform your character, and shape your identity. He wants to love you like his child. God is focused on making you into the person he wants you to be. But if we are distracted by anxiety, we won't hear his voice and see his path for us. And when life throws a curveball, we won't be ready. What happens when life throws something outside your control? Unexpected health

problem. Death of a loved one. Financial tragedy. Loss of a job. Didn't get into the college you want. You won't see the curveball coming. (*toss baseball to Bob who drops the other objects...*) Anxiety leaves you empty-handed. So, what do we do with anxiety? **1 Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your anxieties on him [God] because he cares for you."** I can say it another way. Stick your anxiety on Jesus. (*Starts peeling off duct tape.*)

Somebody has to carry this burden of anxiety. That verse says "God cares for you"! God cares about your anxiety. You can peel off the anxiety and stick it on him because he wants to carry it. Jesus died on the cross to save us. His death gives us forgiveness for our sins and reconciles us to God the Father. He also died for our hurt, our pain, and our worries *and* anxieties. Jesus suffered so that we can stick our anxieties on him. This verse says "cast all your anxiety on him..." ALL of it! The small stuff, the big stuff. Even the things we think we can handle on our own. There are no limits to which anxieties; he takes all of them.

Do not leave here today believing the myths of anxiety. Do not buy into the illusion that you are strong enough or tough enough. We need Jesus! He is our hope and our strength. This is a daily choice we have to make. It's not a one-time fix. Every day, we collect new types of anxiety. And every day, we have to choose to stick it on Jesus.

Before we leave here today, I would like to share some practical suggestions to help us stick our anxiety on Jesus. Personally, I have anxiety about letting people down. I worry about not being successful, and I'm afraid of failing. All of that comes from me trying to control what I can't control. One thing that I helps me is writing down my priorities and tasks and to do lists. Up here, in my head, my anxiety runs around and it's exhausting. But when it move it from up here to out here on paper, I become more calm.

STICKY POINT #1: Write it down.

Keep a to-do list on your phone. Keep a notebook of your thoughts and even your prayers. When you write it down, it clears your head.

STICKY POINT #2: Talk it out.

I am a verbal processor. That means I like to talk a lot. For some us, dealing with anxiety, it's helpful to talk to someone. My wife can tell you that after stressful days, I say to her, "I need to sit down and talk to you." She has graciously sat with me many times and listened to me talk. I shared my fears and anxieties and stress. And you know what? When I hear myself, out loud, I realize some of these things are things outside of my control, and anxiety loses its power in my heart.

Anxiety is like trying to drive through fog. It's dangerous, it's distracting, you can't see where you're going. But when you talk it out with someone you trust, the fog fades away. Find a good friend, someone you trust, who also follows Jesus, and talk it out with them. There have been times that I've talked to another pastor or a professional counselor about my anxieties. A friend of mine, who works as a vice president for a company here in Pittsburgh, told me that when it comes to managing anxiety in your career or marketplace the key is to listen to wise mentors with more experience. He said, *"Too many people have caved under workplace anxiety because they failed to seek counsel from someone with more experience."*

STICKY POINT #3: Toss it up.

Prayer is the best way to trust God with the things beyond our control.

1Peter 5:7 *"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."*

Choose each day to stick anxiety on Jesus. I recommend scheduling a "sticky meeting" with God each day. In prayer, visualize yourself peeling off anxiety and sticking it on Jesus. When you meet with God, you have to decide if you truly trust him with your future. When you get home from work or school, think through the anxiety moments you had and stick those on Jesus. This doesn't mean that our lives will be anxiety-free or perfect. God doesn't promise the dream car, the perfect house, or the luxury vacation. He promises to provide what we need - not always what we want.

Your God cares for you! You have a loving God who wants to carry the things outside our control. When Jesus carried his cross up a mountain to die, he was carrying our burdens, including our anxieties. The cross of Jesus is the proof that our God loves us so much that he is willing to carry the things beyond our control. The resurrection of Jesus is the hope we have that we can trust God to carry us through the most anxious situations.

Our God is a good God. He is a powerful God, full of love and mercy, and he is eager for you to stick your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Right now, we are going to have an opportunity to stick anxiety on Jesus. In front of the cross are pieces of duct tape and markers. During this next song, you are invited to come forward and write down your anxiety on a piece of tape and stick it on the cross as a symbol of your faith and trust in God. Stick your anxieties on him because he cares for you.