

Mortifying Anxiety

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[0:00] Well, we're in the middle of the third section in Brian Borgman's book, Feelings and Faith. If you're interested in picking a copy up, there's still two available in the foyer.

! This section, section three, is all about mortifying ungodly feelings. Ungodly feelings. We talked about sinful anger.

Then last week we talked through bitterness and an unforgiving spirit. And this week, as I prayed, we're talking about fear, anxiety, and worry.

I want to begin by reading just a little story from Brian Borgman's book. It's about him. And it kind of illustrates what we all know about anxiety and feelings, or feeling anxiety.

During seminary days, my wife and I were barely able to make ends meet. We had moved to Portland, Oregon with some faith, but not much money. Jobs were hard to come by, but I was able to get a few janitorial subcontracting accounts, one of which was my meat and potatoes.

[1:09] It was an \$800 a month account at a private school. It might as well have been a million dollars in those days. We paid our rent and utilities and bought our groceries with the income from that account.

It was a big account. One Monday, I received a call from the man in charge of this private school. He wanted to talk to my boss and me, and a meeting was set for Thursday of that week.

The school had just hired a new principal, and I assumed the meeting was called so we could meet her and discuss some additional cleaning tasks. Wednesday afternoon, I was cleaning the school's library and went to clean the glass on the Xerox machine.

As I lifted the lid on the machine, there it was, a contract with another janitorial service, which was owned by the new principal's brother. Doesn't sound like good news.

My anxiety about Thursday's meeting went straight to fear. I looked at the contract and noticed that it underbid our account by almost \$200 a month.

[2:15] My heart sank as I wondered how I was supposed to provide for my wife and two-year-old daughter. Fear gripped me as I faced the certainty of losing the account and the uncertainty of how I could pay rent, let alone buy groceries.

Anxiety, worry, fear, real words to depict very real emotions. Well, I think everyone has been there at one time or the other.

Some of you have a very strong tendency to head towards anxiety and fear. Others of you only struggle with it from time to time.

But I know it's something that all of us have faced, and all of us will face, and all of us do struggle with. And the problem with anxiety and fear and worry is that it's not like some other sins.

It's not really a very ugly, blatant sin like sexual immorality or something like that. And sometimes it's hard to see it as sin because we have a very easy time, a good way of justifying it.

[3:34] We mask our fear and our anxiety and our worry, and we call it concern. We call it concern. And concern sounds a lot worse than worry.

And so we say, well, I'm just concerned about this matter. I'm not really worried about it. It's okay to be concerned. It's not right to worry, but I'm just concerned.

And there is a distinction, and I want to start this lesson by talking about that distinction. I think in some circumstances it's right to be concerned about something, but it isn't right ever to be worried or anxious.

So let me ask you, how do we make the distinction between a legitimate concern about something and worry?

What's the differences? Raise your hand. Dare. Okay. Okay.

[4:35] That's the first thing I thought of. When we're dealing with something that troubles us in the right way, we go to God, don't we? It drives us to prayer.

We go to God. We look at the Word of God. We pray. But when we're worried, we instantly start thinking, we go inward on ourselves.

We start thinking about how I can handle this and what I can do. What else could we say? What else is the difference between concern, a legitimate concern, and sinful worry?

There's more than that, I think. Chuck? Okay. I think that stems from the first thing. There's a lack of faith, isn't there, in worry.

With a concern, that's not necessarily true. I think another area that the difference is seen between concern and worry is, is this something that I really legitimately should be afraid about or not?

[5:38] Is this something that's good to be worried about when I look at it through biblical lenses or not? I think there are some things that we have the right to be concerned about if we're concerned about the right things and we're doing the right, we're going to God with it.

Well, worry keeps us from God, and sinful fearing or anxiety is over things that we don't have any reason to be afraid for. We shouldn't be anxious about these things if we're looking at them biblically.

Now, not all fear is wrong. Not all fear is wrong. You know, so you're driving down the interstate, and you're not paying any attention, and then all of a sudden you look down at your speedometer and you say, Whoa!

You know, have you ever been there? I'm driving too fast. I need to slow down. This isn't safe. Or maybe some of you have just gone south. So you're winding through those hills in Tennessee on the interstate, and there's places where it's like you're almost careening off the edge.

And there's a reason to have legitimate fear if you're too close to the edge. Or, you know, you're out clearing brush, you're cutting down a tree, and your chainsaw starts making a really funny sound.

[6:56] And you say, Well, I've got to stop. This isn't safe anymore. God has given us the emotion of fear for a good reason, and it's to keep us safe in certain circumstances.

It keeps us, it preserves our life. Then there's another kind of fear. And it's not so much to keep us safe, but the Bible says, you know, this is essential to godliness.

What fear am I talking about there? The fear of the Lord. John Murray said that the fear of the Lord, the fear of God, is the soul of godliness.

The fear of God is the soul of godliness. It drives, it animates, it's like our spirit within our body, it animates godliness, a reverent fear of God.

This past Sunday, Sunday night, Monday morning, there was these huge thunderstorms that came through. I don't know if they came through here, but came through Plymouth. And there's just big thunderstorms, really loud thunder, really close.

[8:04] And it woke me out of my sleep. The thunder was so loud and so close. And I'm not normally afraid of those things, but have you ever had that shiver of fear go right into your heart when you hear that?

And then I thought, as I was laying there, I thought, I remembered in my head that what the Bible says about the voice of the Lord. The voice of the Lord thunders.

It's like the thunders of the thunderstorm. Remember when the Israelites were gathered around Mount Sinai, and the Lord speaks to them, and the Israelites say, please stop talking to us.

Talk to Moses or we're going to die. And I was thinking of that, and this fear went into my heart about how great God must be if his voice sounds like what I just heard outside.

That the fear of God is the soul of godliness. Our God is terrifying. And it's good, it's right to be afraid of him, to be fearful, to feel that.

[9:13] Well, not all fear is bad. Some is good. It keeps us safe. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. But I'll tell you what, brothers and sisters.

Most of the time, our worries and our concerns and our fears are not legitimate. If we were honest, a lot of times our fears are, in fact, sinful.

They're over things that they should not be over. We're afraid of what people will think of us. And obviously, I'm talking about, you know, you're not terrified.

Maybe some of you are absolutely shaking in your boots when you're thinking about what you're going to talk to someone about. But there's this spectrum. And maybe it's just this unease about when you're around people.

Remember we went through the book People-Pleasing a couple of years ago? And it said that every one of us, as we come out of the womb, we are approval junkies. I'm craving your approval, and I'm fearful of losing it.

[10:15] I don't want you to think bad of me. And so we're afraid of losing relationships, and we're afraid to speak the truth, and we're afraid of rejection, and we're afraid to evangelize it or to rebuke our brother or sister.

We're anxious about the future. I struggle sometimes with what my children may or may not face in their lives.

Maybe you struggle with fears about your health, your parents' health, your job, your retirement.

Afraid of aging. Afraid of being injured.

And then afraid of that last, most fearsome enemy that we all face, death. Death. And so, all these things.

We fear so many things. And remember our Lord Jesus said, it's precisely these kinds of worries and concerns about, you know, how are you going to provide?

[11:20] What are you going to do? How are you going to live? What are you going to do? What are you going to do with us? What are you going to do with us? Remember in the parable of the sower? Some of that seed fell on onto the soil, and weeds grew up around it.

And he said the weeds choked out the word. And remember what those weeds were, those thorns. he called them the cares of this world the cares of this world being anxious about those things can choke the gospel right out of our lives and that's why Jesus warns us in Luke 21 be careful be careful or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life and that day, the last day the final day that day will come unexpectedly it will close on you unexpectedly like a trap the last day if you live an anxious, fearful life and you're worried about this and that the last day will close upon you and it won't be a good thing it will be a bad thing it will be a trap and it will kill you and so fear can leave us totally unprepared for the last day sinful fear is a deadly enemy it will ruin us for time and it will ruin us for eternity so we have to overcome it well, that's what we're talking about how do we overcome fear?

how do we overcome anxiety? well, first we want to understand what does the Bible say? what does the Bible teach about sinful fear? turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 12 Luke chapter 12 we're going to read verses 25 and 26 so we're seeking to understand what the Bible says about sinful fear and anxiety and worry verse 25 who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

since you cannot do this very little thing why do you worry about the rest? what is Jesus saying about worry? someone help me out what is Jesus saying about worry?

it doesn't help it's useless it doesn't accomplish anything anything Jesus was talking to people who live day to day I mean I think in our culture we know what it is to run out at the end of a week or something like that maybe these people worked and then at the end of the day they got some money and with that money they bought their food for that day or for the next day they lived day to day they never knew if they were going to have a job the next day if they were going to have food well none of us are there really and I think if we were there I mean can you imagine the workout your faith would get if you lived day to day well that's how these people lived and Jesus says don't be afraid don't worry do not worry and the reason is is because worry is useless it's useless it doesn't accomplish anything and we that might sound like a no brainer

[15:05] I mean everyone knows that right now when everything's all safe and sound but if we thought like we should we wouldn't worry like we do so maybe lying in bed worrying about your future worrying about what if this happens or that happens worrying about how you're going to pay for this bill pay for this it doesn't do anything is what Jesus is saying the Chinese say have a saying talk doesn't cook rice it doesn't do it and worry doesn't pay the bills it's useless now do you keep useless junk around your house things that are just broken and you can't find any use for them well I hope you don't and that's what worry is it's just this worthless thing that you can't do anything with but isn't this precisely where we struggle we think by worrying we're actually accomplishing something so we're lying in bed and we're ruminating over our problems and we're thinking over it and thinking over it and

I know when I'm doing that somehow secretly in my heart I think I'm actually figuring the problem out or I'm actually going to solve this or I'm actually going to get something done by worrying about it and by fretting about it and Jesus our good teacher our Lord he says don't worry it's useless to do that it does no good but the Bible says other things and we need to understand some other things

the Bible says about worry worry doesn't do any good but it actually creates problems it creates problems it's a springboard to other sins to other problems listen to Proverbs chapter 12 verse 25 an anxious heart weighs a man down but a kind word cheers him up you know what Solomon's talking about don't you some bad news comes or something is there to make you worry and it's like a ball and chain around your neck you can't keep your head up and you wake up and there's your worry and it weighs you down and getting out of bed takes effort brushing your teeth is wearisome telling your wife that you love her it's just too much anxiety weighs a man down it doesn't make the problems any easier it actually makes them harder to overcome because you're just drained you're emotionally weak and that's what anxiety does but more than that anxiety leads to other sins it leads to other evil

Psalms 37:8 do not fret it leads only to evil so wear there's this big road sign as you're driving down the road of anxiety and fear and it says sin up ahead sin is coming there's nothing good there so worry is like a gateway to other sins maybe you've heard of gateway drugs I don't know if they still talk about those things but you know like if you get started on marijuana then you know that really increases your chances of going to harder drugs cocaine or whatever there's these gateway drugs well worry is a gateway sin when you get involved in worry and anxiety it is inevitably going to lead you to greater and worse sins Isaiah 57 we're not going to turn there it says that worrying leads to forgetting God isn't that just pretty much the essence of worry when we when we worry we just forget God and when we get into the habit of worrying

God is just pretty much cut out of our lives we cut him out we forget him well listen to this quote from John Piper and maybe I'll just give you some of the context John Piper used to be absolutely terrified of speaking in public I mean he was he was physically it made him sick he would tremble and shake he wouldn't even answer questions in classes and he was just anxious about this all the time and he's grown out of that and this is this is what he's writing I've learned that anxiety is a condition of the heart that gives rise to many other sinful states of mind think for a moment how many different sinful actions and attitudes come from anxiety so let's turn on our thinking caps let's follow him and think about how we've seen this in our own life anxiety about finances can give rise to coveting and greed and hoarding and stealing anxiety about succeeding at some task can make you irritable and abrupt and surly anxiety about relationships can make you withdrawn and indifferent and uncaring about other people anxiety about how someone will respond to you can make you cover over the truth and lie about things so if anxiety could be conquered a mortal blow would be struck to many other sins so you have the picture anxiety is this tree that all these other sins grow on and Piper is saying if we can cut down this tree of anxiety all that other fruit dies too it kills all these other sins so anxiety is a gateway sin and if we can kill this sin then a lot of other sins are going to die too so how do we kill it well first we understand it biblically it's useless it's an unnecessary weight it's dangerous it's a gateway sin and then second we find the root we find the root anxiety is like a dandelion they're starting to grow how do you get rid of a dandelion you just can't run the lawnmower over it you can't just cut that little yellow the flower off of it it's going to be back you have to get down to the root and if we are going to kill the sin of anxiety we have to get down to the root so let me ask you what is the root of anxiety dad unbelief very good unbelief now this is a little harder

I want you to think about this how does unbelief in what ways when we give ourselves to unbelief does worry come from that how does unbelief lead to worry just kind of walk me through your own experience or how that works out so you're not believing why do you worry dad okay there's a couple things there I want you guys to keep thinking there's a couple things in what my dad said one you're not believing something about God right God God isn't going to take care of you that's what you're believing about God and secondly you're not believing or you are believing that it's all up to you that the amount of resources that you can marshal is the total amount of resources that you have available if you can't solve it and if you can't figure out how to fix it then you're stuck so that leads to worry how else what other ways does unbelief lead to worry think of anything right you're not you're not believing that

[24:04] God cares for you you're not believing any of those promises all the promises we're going to talk about later that God gives us to not worry so we won't worry unbelief makes God small it makes him unable to help us in some way it makes our problems we're believing our problems are too hard for God or too little for God he doesn't care he couldn't care about those things and so here's the here's the temptation and this is the temptation that you face and that I face that when anxiety comes and when worry comes we think of it too often as coming from the outside it's these

circumstances it's these things that are happening that are making me afraid remember how we talked about anger that too often we blame well it's my wife's fault she's unresponsive or it's my child's fault he's hard hearted rebellious whatever it's their fault that I'm angry it's this situation it's this flat tire it's this whatever it's that and that's the reason

I'm angry well we do the same thing with anxiety we think it's those outside circumstances that are making us anxious and so we're just sort of carried along on the tide we can't help ourselves this is I mean we have to feel this way because the circumstances are what they are but that's not quite true is it not quite true at all anxiety and fear don't come from the outside they come from our heart they come from our understanding of our relationship with God they come from who we are the situation on the outside is the occasion it's not the reason just like we needed to make that distinction with anger we need to make that distinction!

with anxiety the situation on the outside whether it's terrorist or bank failures or economic collapse or the bully or whatever those are the outside that's the occasion that is not the reason that we are afraid we really don't believe God when we're anxious the fact is the reason we're anxious is we don't believe God his promises his character has gone fuzzy do you know what I'm saying where you know we read the scripture and it's like yeah but that doesn't really help me in this circumstance or yeah but I don't see how that makes any sense or he really doesn't care I know he's saying he cares but he doesn't care something happens his character his promises they go fuzzy and the fact is that's why we're anxious we don't believe and that's what

Jesus said in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount in the middle of his preaching on worry he says this if that is how God clothes the grass of the field which is here today and gone tomorrow or is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire will he not much more clothe you oh you of little faith why are we afraid because we have little faith anxiety is the result of unbelief and so when we are gripped with fear we are making an evaluation you are making an evaluation you are showing what you really believe at that time when we're afraid our souls are speaking and it's saying what we believe and who we don't believe and so when I'm worried let's work through an example when I'm worried about my job or and providing for my family like

I'm going to lose my job like Brian Borgman was struggling with what am I believing in that circumstance And what am I not believing? What do you think?

[28:37] There It's up to you It's up to you So who's the God in your life? Me If I can't do it no one can That's what I believe and it leaves me in a world of worry Well what am I not believing about God?

Linda God's not in control He's not sovereign He doesn't have this situation under control I mean it's so easy to think oh he controls all things and all their actions but actually when we boil that down into our particular circumstance it's hard to believe that God is in sovereign control of our boss and our job and the decisions of these corporations that we're a part of so we're not believing that what else aren't we believing about God or what are we believing about ourselves Carl yeah I gave you that handout on Matthew 6:7 anxiety fighting promises the lilies of the field

God cares for them and so obviously if God doesn't care for us we're obviously not as important as they are and what kind of father does that make God out to be when he cares about the grass in his yard but he doesn't care about the children in his house well anxiety comes from unbelief now do you see then how we kill anxiety how do you mortify this ungodly emotion that we have it's we poison that plant with the promises of God we poison the plant of anxiety with the promises of God so if you have a pen and paper I'm going to go through some promises very quickly and you know what you might not need these now but it might be good to have them written down just for a future date

God's promises kill unbelief and when we begin to trust in them instead of the lies that we have been believing we kill anxiety and I want to be clear up it is because we're believing a lie that we're anxious we're believing I'm God that God is mean that God isn't in control that God doesn't care that it's all up to me that I'm in charge we're believing all those lies and that's why we're anxious and so what we want to do is to get inside of our brains and replace those lies with the truth of God's 2 Timothy 1:7 you don't have to turn there you shouldn't be afraid because that isn't who you are anymore for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power of love and of self discipline and brothers and sisters inside of every one of you if you are a believer is a new heart a new spirit and it's put there by the

Holy Spirit it's animated by the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit gives us power it gives us love it gives us self discipline and believe it or not those are the opposite of timidity and of fear what is it to be timid it's to go into a circumstance and to think you know what I don't have any power I don't have any ability!

[32:43] I can't do this and it's all up to me and that's the opposite of love where if I have to guard myself and watch out for myself I'm not loving anyone and what the Holy Spirit does is it gives us power that power doesn't come from us but it comes from him and so when we go into a circumstance we don't go in there by ourselves we go in with the Holy Spirit and we are given this power the spirit of love that makes me love the people that I'm involved with and of self discipline sober mindedness thinking under control not going crazy believing every lie but to be solidly rooted that's who we are because we are born again because the Holy Spirit lives within us Romans 8 15 you don't have to be afraid because you are God's children there's no reason to be anxious because you are God's children for you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear so what is it to be an unbeliever it's to be enslaved to a spirit of fear you are chained to anxiety and you just run around that chain and that ball all your life but we have not received that spirit for you you've received the spirit of sonship you've received the spirit of sonship and by him we cry

Abba Father we by the Holy Spirit understand and feel and know that we are the children of God that as the children of God status and the rights of Jesus Christ who said Abba Father and so God puts the spirit of sonship in us so we're not slaves to fear anymore you're God's child so when you go into a situation or circumstances happen to you there's no reason to be anxious because God your father Proverbs 18 10 we just memorized this not too long ago the name of the Lord is a strong tower the righteous man runs into it and is safe remember how we talked about the oxygen truths of God's word here's one of them

God's character what does this proverb say God is a strong tower so when the circumstances the hurricane winds of circumstance and all these troubles and worries are blowing through our life we're not you're not left in this tent out in the middle of the field have you ever been there in the middle of you're camping in the middle of a thunderstorm and you feel so exposed that's not what it is for you the Lord is a strong tower that's who he is that's who he is for you it's his character and you run into him and you're safe you're safe and so you know he can protect you he'll keep you safe everything that you need he has he's this well stocked strong tower

Romans 8 28 for we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose what are you anxious about now can you pick something out now bring that truth to Romans 8 28 that fear if it should happen if the thing that you're so afraid of if it should happen it will be for your good it will be for your good if that terrible thing should happen if that scary worrisome thing happens it will be for your good so is God rocking your boat and you're out there in the waves and the water splashing into your boat and the things that you dread are coming upon you you don't have to be afraid because all

God is doing is he is rearranging the circumstances to do you more good I think that's one reason we're so afraid of change we experience God now but we're afraid around the corner he won't be there but Romans 8 28 says that's not true all he's doing is rearranging things and he's going to do us more good in a different way there's no reason to be anxious Romans 8 38 for I am convinced that neither death nor life neither angels nor demons neither the present nor the future nor any powers neither height nor depth nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord that thing that you are afraid of is powerless before the love of God it cannot separate God's love from you God will blow through every worrisome situation and love you because of Jesus Christ and we could go on and on I gave you that seven anxiety fighting promises from the

[38:14] Sermon on the Mount keep those you might not need them now but you know what sometime you might need them and go through them use it when you're!!! You kill anxiety you kill it with the promises of God you poison it with the promises of God and so when that situation you say to yourself over and over again I am believing a lie if I am worried I am believing a lie and I replace it with the truth I replace wrong thoughts with right thoughts and so when the fear of the Lord respect for him replaces my sinful I want to end where we started Brian Borgman things are not going so well I want you to hear how he handled the problem and how God took care of things on that overcast Thursday morning I sat on the steps outside the office waiting for the appointment my heart was dissipating or my fear was dissipating as

I recited to myself and prayed through Isaiah 41 10 fear not for I am with you be not dismayed for I am your God I will strengthen you I will help you I will uphold you with my righteous right hand and I preached to myself and I prayed God is with me I do not need to fear God is my God I do not need to be anxious God promises to strengthen me I will get through this God's we will not starve or be left destitute so do you see him on the step Isaiah 41 10 that promise fear not for I am with you going he's preaching to himself and that's what we need to do the meeting happened I lost the account I was blamed for not doing a good enough job although I knew the real reason we lost the contract was that we were under bid but that was okay

I was able to share Isaiah 41 10 with Ariel his wife I told her how God had helped me and delivered me from my fear we gave thanks together and rejoiced that our God is the God of gods who loves his children is present with his children and protects and provides for his children what can man do to us we will not be afraid and by the way God gave me a better job that got us through seminary without having to scratch and scrape to make ends meet well God would have been good and faithful if they wouldn't have had a job but you know what the Lord provided the Lord was good to them and so our God is good brothers and sisters let's trust him let's fight anxiety with the promises that he's given us let's cast our cares on him because he does care for us we are dismissed