

Let's Talk About It
Anxiety
Clay Weed

TALK IT OVER

Key Scripture:

Mark 4:35-41 (NLT)

35 As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." 36 So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). 37 But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. 38 Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?" 39 When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. 40 Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" 41 The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!"

Matthew 6:25-34 (NLT)

25 "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? 27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? 28 "And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, 29 yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. 30 And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? 31 "So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?'" 32 These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. 33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. 34 "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Philippians 4:6-8 (NLT)

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- Share an example of an interesting or funny vanity plate or bumper sticker you have seen. Are there other vehicle markings, accessories or modifications that stand out to you?

Start **thinking**. Ask a question to get your group thinking.

- **Read Mark 4:35-41.** What does this example demonstrate about the strength of our faith amidst trials?
- **Read Matthew 6:25-34.** What does diligent, prudent and responsible concern look like in light of this exhortation to not worry about everyday life things like food and clothing?
- **Read Philippians 4:6-8.** Why does Paul instruct us to pray instead of worry? What must we do to experience God's peace?

Start **sharing**. Choose a question to create openness.

- Have you ever struggled with anxiety in your life? Do you still ever find yourself held captive by it? If not, what did you do to find freedom from a life of worry and anxiety?
- Clay mentioned that thunderstorms are created partly due to unstable air in the earth's atmosphere. What could be some areas of "unstable air" causing anxiety in our lives?
- When Jesus calmed the storm in Mark 4, He took control of the situation at hand. Why do you think it is hard for most people to take control of anxious circumstances in their lives?
- Clay said, "What you think about determines your level of peace." What are your thoughts mostly focused on throughout the day? What can you do to change the focus of your thoughts?
- Relating to the illustration of the "I Can" and the "God Can," what areas do you have a hard time of holding onto instead of releasing to God? In what areas do you over-practice faith and under practice responsibility?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- Focus on God's grace in your life, and give your worries and requests over to Him.

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- Father, thank you for your word, and for reminding us that you are in control. Please help us to focus on your grace, so that we may not worry about the things of this world. -Amen

Start **digging**. For further study.

- Read the 2nd page and discuss it.

Question: "What does the Bible say about anxiety?"

Answer: The Bible has a lot to say about anxiety, but the word itself may not be found all that often. In the English Standard Version, it is used 8 times. In the New International Version, it is found 7 times. The King James Version does not use the word at all. Synonyms like *trouble*, *heaviness*, *distress*, and *cares* are used in its place.

The specific causes of anxiety are probably more than can be enumerated, but a few examples from the Bible point to some general causes. In Genesis 32, Jacob is returning home after many years away. One of the reasons he had left home was to escape the anger of his brother, Esau, from whom Jacob had stolen the birthright and blessing from their father. Now, as Jacob nears his homeland, he hears that Esau is coming to meet him with 400 men. Jacob is immediately anxious, expecting a horrible battle with his brother. In this case, the anxiety is caused by a broken relationship and a guilty conscience.

In 1 Samuel 1, Hannah is distressed because she was unable to conceive children and she was being taunted by Peninnah, her husband's other wife. Her distress is caused by unfulfilled desires and the harassment of a rival. In Esther 4, the Jewish people are anxious because of a royal decree allowing them to be massacred. Queen Esther is anxious because she was planning to risk her life on behalf of her people. Fear of death and the unknown is a key element of anxiety.

Not all anxiety is sinful. In 1 Corinthians 7:32, Paul states that an unmarried man is "anxious" about pleasing the Lord, while a married man is "anxious" about pleasing his wife (ESV). In this case, the anxiety isn't a sinful fear but a deep, proper concern.

Probably the best-known passage on anxiety comes from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6. Our Lord warns us against being anxious about the various cares of this life. For the child of God, even necessities like food and clothing are nothing to worry about. Using examples from God's creation, Jesus teaches that our Heavenly Father knows our needs and cares about them. If God takes care of simple things like grass, flowers, and birds, won't He also care for people who are created in His image? Rather than worry over things we cannot control, we should "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things [the necessities of life] will be added to you" (verse 33). Putting God first is a cure for anxiety.

Many times, anxiety or concern is a result of sin, and the cure is to deal with the sin. Psalm 32:1-5 says that the person whose sin is forgiven is blessed, and the heavy weight of guilt is taken away when sins are confessed. Is a broken relationship creating anxiety? Try to make peace (2 Corinthians 13:11). Is fear of the unknown leading to anxiety? Turn the situation over to the God who knows everything and is in control of it all (Psalm 68:20). Are overwhelming circumstances causing anxiety? Have faith in God. When the disciples became distressed in a storm, Jesus first rebuked their lack of faith, then rebuked the wind and the waves (Matthew 8:23-27). As long as we are with Jesus, there is nothing to fear.

We can count on the Lord to provide for our needs, protect us from evil, guide us, and keep our souls secure for eternity. We may not be able to prevent anxious thoughts from entering our minds, but we can practice the right response. Philippians 4:6, 7 instructs us to "not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."