

## OVERCOMING ANXIETY AND FEAR

Fear is the most primitive and basic of all emotions. It was given to us by God to alert us to and protect us from threat and danger. In life threatening situations fear produces a huge rush of adrenalin into our bodies so that we can either fight or run away (the 'fight or flight' mechanism) This is a normal God-given reaction to the threat and it would be abnormal not to feel fear under the circumstances.

However the problem occurs when we start to live in fear or anticipation of life-threatening events when there is no likelihood of harm being done to us. Anxiety and fear can grip our lives and dominate our thinking and this is a problem which needs to be faced and overcome.

Anxiety is like the younger brother of fear. It is a milder version but never the less it can be just as damaging and cause us to develop all sorts of maladaptive behaviours.



### **How does anxiety feel?**

Look at the following words which describe the sensation of anxiety:

Tense

Restless

Unhappy

No peace

Ruminating thoughts

Breathless

Agitated

Vigilant

Withdrawn

Think about how you feel when you are anxious.....



### **What causes us to be fearful, anxious or lose our Courage?**

Here are some possible causes:

Conflict

Disapproval – rejection

Loss of love – rejection

Being evaluated

Physical illness/injury

Death/dying – loved ones/self

Pain/distress/discomfort

Loss of control

Threats to our or our children's health or happiness or success

Change/ the unknown



### **What makes you anxious?**

Other fears/anxieties:

Fear of Failure

Fear of Intimacy

Fear of Poverty/financial reversal

Fear of the Future / old age

Fear of Robbery / attack



### **What effect do these fears and anxieties have on us?**

There are three main ways:

Draw back / Avoid

Try to control

We worry – engage in ruminating anxious thoughts

All three of these strategies will cause us problems and are not successful ways of handling anxiety. They will lead to negative consequences for our lives:

People who avoid what they fear withdraw from life and live small and confined lives.

Those who try to control circumstances and people end up unhappy, frustrated and they often alienate those they love most.

Worry is a time-consuming and fruitless activity which leaves us more anxious than ever



So how can we overcome Anxiety in our lives? - 3 Strategies for tackling anxiety:

#### **STEP 1**

Fight the battle in your MIND.

Gain control of your thinking Don't allow anxious thoughts to dominate. You can't stop a bird from flying over your head, but you can prevent it from making a nest in our hair!

Use the 3R technique to change your thinking. The three R's are:

Recognise

Reject

Replace

a) Recognise what you are saying to yourself. Each person has an internal monologue e.g. "What if Tommy's illness is more serious than we think. What if it's cancer or something life threatening." "I couldn't handle it if something happened to my child/husband/wife."

Ask yourself: "What am I saying to myself?" Learn to recognise what you are thinking.

b) Reject: Say to yourself: "No – Stop! I reject these fearful negative thoughts. I refuse to be controlled by fears and what ifs." "I refuse to think these thoughts any longer!"

c) Replace with the TRUTH "Whatever happens I will trust you Lord. You are in control. You are Lord. I commit my child/husband/wife into your hands. I believe you love me and want what's best for me."

"The truth is whatever happens you will sustain me and help me. I am not alone."



## **STEP 2:**

Fight the battle in your BEHAVIOUR.

Many times we avoid what we are afraid of we draw back and don't behave in ways that we should. We avoid situations or people. Whenever we use avoidance to lessen our fear it grows and we suffer negative consequences.

There is only one way to tackle fear and anxiety that is to FACE it.

What are some examples of avoidance behaviours?

Not confronting an obvious problem because of possible fallout (e.g. marriage situation)

Not trying new things because of fear of failure.

Not using your talents because you may not do it perfectly or others may not appreciate your efforts

Avoiding difficult painful tasks – asking your boss for a raise

Avoiding people who have angered you. eg. avoiding a difficult visit.

Not going to certain places

Avoidance is Satan's weapon, because it gives us temporary short term relief, but in the

long term it only serves to reinforce our fear and it also reinforces our view of ourselves as inadequate, weak and a failure.

It works like this:

Avoid What You Fear > The Fear Grows

Do The Things You Fear > The Fear Lessens



### **STEP 3:**

Learn to LET GO CONTROL and give control to the Lord.

Anxiety causes us to feel that the situation is out of control and is not safe. We try to get back our feeling of safety by trying to control situations and people.

#### **What are some of the controlling behaviours we engage in?**

Being over controlling and overprotective of our children – no you can't go to a sleep over. No you can't climb that tree.

Trying to prevent anything from going wrong.

Being bossy

Following a set of oughts, shoulds, and musts and expecting others to do the same.

Being over-vigilant in an attempt to prevent problems

Being over-organised or obsessed with cleanliness



#### **Do you exhibit any controlling behaviours?**

Faith and trust are the antidote to control. We were designed to live in a dependent, trusting relationship with the Lord. Adam and Eve knew what it was to depend entirely on the Lord for all their needs. We need to get to the place where we can say "Lord I don't understand you, but I trust you. I relinquish control and dependence. I give it all to you. Do with me as you wish."

John14:18 says: "Perfect love drives out fear."

When we know how perfectly we are loved by God we can stop being afraid. We can face life with confidence.

John14:1 says: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me."

Philippians 4:6 says: "Do not be anxious about anything but in every thing by prayer and petition with thanks giving, present your requests to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Take some time now to think about how you can apply the three steps to your life.