

Behind the Mask

Anxiety, Worry, and Stress

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Week 2

Matthew 6:25-32

Welcome to week two of our series, Behind the Mask. We're dealing with some pretty sensitive issues that we don't like to talk about, and we don't like to bring out in the open. We're talking about what's going on behind the mask. The part of our lives we don't like to deal with, or we don't know how to deal with: mental health: anxiety, worry, stress, depression, self-harm, suicide, our need to be known, loved, accepted, and how to deal with trauma.

The Apostle Paul writes to the church in Rome, *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* (Romans 8:28, NIV)

All things--Anxiety. Depression. Pain. Jesus redeems all things. That means he takes ugly, sick, evil wounds and turns them into beautiful works of art. So, we're just trying to get honest about what's going on in our own lives and the lives of so many other people about mental health, because the fact is we've got a problem. So many of us and people that we care about are dealing with, struggling with things like worry and anxiety and stress and burnout and loneliness and panic and even self-harm and suicide, depression, these kinds of things.

And Jesus is not okay with that. He cares about us. He cares about our whole selves, not just the spiritual part of us. Jesus wants to bring you with him to heaven one day, but he wants to bring wholeness and healing to you on earth right now.

1. In everyday life, where do you find yourself trying to "hold it together" on the outside, even when you feel a little feel a little off on the inside?

Four root causes to mental health challenges: Situational, Biological, Clinical, Spiritual. We often find these roots inter-connected in our lives. And these roots often grow into full blown plants in our lives through anxiety, worry, and stress.

So, What do you worry about? What keeps you up at night? What keeps you from doing what you need to do? When you find yourself anxious, it's a good idea to ask yourself, "What's really going on here? Where am I longing for peace? What am I believing that isn't true? Where do I need to invite Jesus in? Do I need to ask for help here?"

According to Christian counselors, Anxiety is a prolonged, complex, emotional state that is often triggered by an initial fear. For example, you could feel anxious about going to visit friends because they live in an older home that might have spiders or about going to the movies because the film might contain a scene with spiders. The basic fear is of encountering a spider, but you live in a state of persistent anxiety about the future possibility of being exposed to a spider. So, anxiety is a more enduring experience than fear. It's a state of apprehension and physical pressure in which you believe you can't control or predict potentially aversive future events.

2. If anxiety is about the lack of control over potential aversive future events, what is it that causes you the most anxiety? What have you experienced in your life that may have triggered this anxiety?

To summarize: Fear is a basic, automatic state of alarm consisting of a perception or conclusion of imminent threat or danger to your safety and security. Anxiety is a prolonged, complex emotional state that occurs when a person anticipates that some future situation, event, or circumstance may involve a personally distressing, unpredictable, and uncontrollable threat to his or her vital interests.

What's fascinating is that the Bible speaks to this and guides us through it. For example, Solomon says, "*Anxiety weighs down the heart*" (Proverbs 12:25, NIV). Don't miss the gravity of what he's saying. The word heart is *leb*, which means "inner part, thoughts, consciousness." Unlike the modern English word heart, the Hebrew word means your feelings and your thinking.

To the ancient Hebrews, the heart was the seat of your thoughts. In today's language—the mind. Ancient Hebrews called the heart, "the well." It's the part of us—deep under the layers of topsoil—where the soul bleeds. According to King Solomon, when there's anxiety in your mind—in your thoughts, in your imaginations, deep in your well—the result is depression in your emotions and feelings.

How we think influences how we feel.

That is why anxiety and depression are inseparable. There's an old saying that says, "What's down in the well comes up in the bucket." At some point, we have to deal with what's down in the well. What's causing the pain? Remember the four root causes to mental health challenges? Situational, Biological, Clinical, and Spiritual.

It is good to know the root cause of your anxiety, worry, or stress. BUT...It is not always possible to know the root cause of your anxiety, worry, or stress. Regardless, there is hope to move forward on a path towards peace. "*Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him.*" (Psalm 62:5, NIV)

3. Have you ever noticed patterns in what tends to trigger stress or anxiety in your life, even if you can't fully explain why?

4. When you feel anxious or overwhelmed, what do you usually look to relief or a sense of peace?

Whatever the cause of your pain, the solution is greater than the cause. Our souls can find rest. Where? In God alone. We all need this rest, and there are many different tools and practices that can help us gain that rest—such as, Sabbath, Scripture, Silence, Solitude.

But how do we get from anxiety to rest? Trust and obey (even if we struggle with doubt).

Sure. Sounds simple, right? But what about? What if? The reason we start with trust is because life is uncertain. We do have fears. We might struggle with doubt. But the reason we can trust is because we are placing our HOPE not in our circumstances but in our God who guides us through our circumstances.

CORE of WORRY: Trying to control tomorrow before trusting God for today.

Being a Christian doesn't mean you won't have bad things happen to you. It means when bad things do happen, you still find joy and peace and serenity that abide. And you know it as well with your soul because God is greater than your circumstances.

"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19, ESV)

Paul didn't say every "want," he said every "need." And some of you right now might be facing anxiety and worry and stress where you desperately need God to bring you peace according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

"The presence of anxiety is unavoidable. But the prison of anxiety is optional." (Max Lucado)

Jesus spoke to this in His sermon that we call the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6. And what we learn is that At the root of worry is our desire to control what we can't control. What did Jesus say? *"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life"* (Matthew 6:25a, NIV). The word Jesus used for worry is *merimnate* which is used in the New Testament for both worry and anxiety. Jesus says don't harbor or hold onto thoughts of worry or anxiety about your life, what you will eat or drink or wear, because life is more than those things.

Now, if you have money, you don't worry about what you will eat or drink or wear, because money gives you a sense of control. But it doesn't take much in this world to snuff out that sense of control. And that's where the worry sets in. It's the "what ifs" we face every day. What if our economy crashes? What if there's some global war that leads to a financial crisis?

What Jesus teaches us is, Don't pull tomorrow's worries into today. Look at what Jesus says in v. 26: *"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"* (Matthew 6:26, NIV)

At the root of worry is disbelief in God's goodness.

5. If you were to be completely honest, what is it that you are trusting in more than God? Geo-political events, governmental powers, stable financial markets, etc.?

Read Matthew 6:27-34.

So, what's the antidote to worry? Look at v. 33: *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* (Matthew 6:33, NIV)

"Seek first" is the same Greek word that means "run after." We need to run after God, because life is hard. V. 34: *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."* (Matthew 6:34, NIV)

Life is hard. Each day... Out of a job – hard. Not enough money – hard. Fit in school – hard. Raising kids – hard. But Jesus says, "I'll be with you through today's trouble, waiting for you tomorrow when it arrives."

We all have masks. One day God will restore us and make us whole. In the in between, there is some healing God wants to bring.

Next Steps:

1. Stop by the Resource Center. [Every week we will introduce a new resource that is available in our Resource Center. This week, *Winning the War in your Mind*.
2. Go to e91church.com/counseling [Sign up and use "MASK" to get the church discount of a free counseling session.]
3. Attend Behind the Mask Process Group <https://e91church.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/3405286>