

PASTORING ANXIOUS STUDENTS & FACULTY

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Some info about today

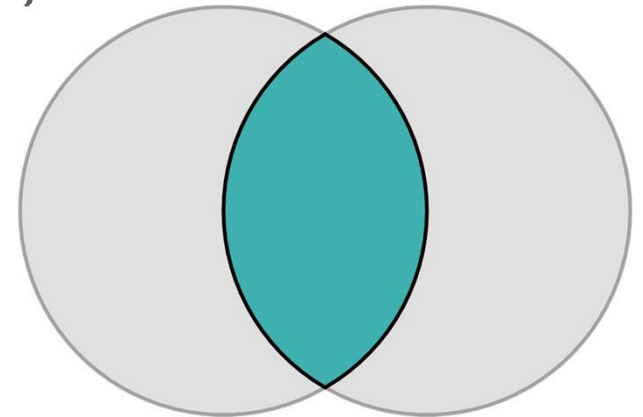
- We have Christy Gates from Scripture Engagement who is helping me facilitate today
- We will have a time for questions at the end, so please write down your questions as we go and you'll have time to ask them at the end
- We will have some break-out chats where you will meet with a small group online and have some interaction around the topics we discuss
 - Each small group should designate someone as the reporter
 - When the groups come back to the main session, each reporter will give a brief summary (one sentence only please) via private chat to Christy, who will then summarize them out to us
- This main session is being recorded, but not the breakout discussions
- If you are watching this recorded, you may want to have your journal or some paper to do the exercises
- This session will be approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes

**Everyone in the group chat,
introduce yourself:**

**Name,
role in our out of IV,
location**

INTRODUCTION

- A spiritually healthy response to anxiety
- Multi-disciplinary approach to anxiety
 - Psychology
 - Spiritual Formation
 - Synergy and tensions
- My background in both:
 - Spiritual Direction Certificate, North Park Seminary
 - D.Min. Spiritual Formation, Tyndale Seminary
 - M.A. Counseling, Northeastern Illinois University



OUR ROLE IS TO PASTOR

- It's important to keep our perspective
- We are there to pastor not be mental health professionals
- We want to give a spiritually healthy response, that includes:
 - Avoiding unhelpful responses
 - Emphasizing spiritual responses that support mental health
 - Referring students to mental health professionals when necessary

When to refer...

- Level of distress felt by the student
- If anxiety interferes with:
 - daily activities like sleeping, eating, concentrating enough to study and so on
- If the anxious thoughts are intrusive
- If they extend to many areas of life

Some Anxiety Treatments

- Desensitization/Exposure Therapies
 - Exposure and Response Prevention
 - Stopping excessive checking
 - Stopping continual reassurance seeking
 - Systematic Desensitization
 - Flooding
- Opposite of desensitization is avoidance
 - Avoidance can make anxiety worse

Some Anxiety Treatments





- Transforming traumatic experiences
 - Receiving empathy and attunement
- Mindfulness based therapies
 - Requires investment
 - Changes to the brain
- Medication

What doesn't work and what does...

Exercise: *What is the best & worst advice you've been given in how to deal with anxiety?*

Reporter: *Give a short summary from the discussion (via private chat to Christy) when you come back to the main session*

More faith...

- We simply tell them to not worry and have faith.
 - Faith is not something they can dig deep and conjure up
 - Faith is not a matter of effort
- It is better to:
 - Suggest they pray regularly for increased faith
 - Go over Mark 9:24 with them
 - Pray with them to have more faith
 - Clarify that it's for the long run

More Scripture...

- We point them to all the verses that tell us not to be afraid
 - Helpful for some and not others
 - For some, don't have faith to internalize it deeply enough
 - Possibly other issues
- It is better to...
 - Suggest that they pray/meditate over certain scriptures daily
 - Pray with them to internalize scriptures
 - Emphasize this is a long term effort, otherwise may feel like relationship with God is a failure if they don't experience relief fast enough



Continually giving reassurance...

- We continually reassure someone who is anxious.
 - The problem is no one can guarantee that, and they know it.
 - Usually with anxiety, the brain of the anxious person reacts to a very unlikely scary outcome as if it were highly likely.
- It is better to...
 - Pray for perspective
 - Provide initial assurance with empathy
 - If they keep seeking reassurance, it could be unhealthy rumination—
 - Pray with them that the original assurance would be enough and that they resist the need to continually seek reassurance
 - Basically praying for strength in “Response Prevention”



When God Uses Systematic Desensitization

- Example: fear of public speaking, but boss asks for a presentation to large audience
- What is God up to?
 - Bringing healing
 - Drawing us nearer
 - Building faith



Exercise

- Think of a time when it seemed God was asking you to do something you felt anxious about
- What did you do?
- What was the result?
- Does your group notice a theme?

Reporter:

- summarize that theme in the private chat when you come back to the main session

Anxiety Redemption Prayer

Anxiety Redemption Prayer in Scripture



	Jesus	Paul
Scripture:	Mark 14:32-41	2 Cor 12: 7-10
What they were facing:	Gethsemane	Thorn in flesh
1. Asked for relief	Asked for another way	Asked that it be removed
2. Answer was no	The cross was God's will	God told him his grace was sufficient for him
3. Accepted with hope for redemption	Hebrews 12:2 "For the joy set before him he endured the cross"	2 Cor 12:9 "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. "

Anxiety Redemption Prayer

- Model of prayer for dealing with anxiety
- Requires theological clarity on three points
 - **Acceptance:** The cross is unavoidable
 - Acceptance of the suffering God allows in our lives
 - **Redemption:** The cross leads to resurrection power
 - God's redeeming power
 - **Gratitude:** Giving thanks in the middle of difficulty

Acceptance: The Cross Is Not Avoidable

- Following Jesus includes carrying our cross and following him
- Resisting the cross creates spiritual and psychological tension
 - Spiritually, it gets in the way of our relationship with God
 - Psychologically, it creates anxiety
 - Much anxiety comes from efforts to avoid all suffering or a particular kind of suffering
 - Mindfulness therapies focus on a kind of radical acceptance

Redemption Power

- Understanding of God's redemption is sometimes too narrow
- Some true but insufficient views:
 - God will bring something good out of it
 - I can minister to someone going through something similar in the future
 - God is strengthening my character

Sharing in the suffering of Christ

- Sharing in the sufferings of Christ also means sharing in his resurrection
- Jesus' resurrection had redemptive power
- Sharing in the sufferings of Christ also means we share in the redemptive power of his resurrection
- Said another way:
 - My suffering not only teaches me to become more kind, patient and loving like Christ, it also gives me more of Christ's power to bless others through my ministry
- Do you notice that people in ministry who have suffered have a more powerful impact on you spiritually?

Example of missional redemption

- Jim and Elizabeth Elliot went to be missionaries among the Auca tribe in Ecuador in the 1950's
- Jim and other missionaries were killed by Auca spears
- In faith Elizabeth went back to them
- The tribe ended up coming to Christ
- Elizabeth's suffering was redeemed by God in that the fruitfulness of her ministry was multiplied

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. ***If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation;***

2 Corinthians 4:10-12

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. ***So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.***

Romans 8:28-29

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. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son*, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

- Our suffering is not wasted

Gratitude In Difficulty

- Since we know God is doing something to redeem
- We can be grateful for the redemption
- Express gratitude for how he is redeeming it
- **Phil 4:6** *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

How Anxiety Redemption Prayer Works

- Pray for God to fix the problem
- Express gratitude for how he is redeeming it
 - **Psychologically:** brings calm
 - **Spiritually:** builds faith
- Reinforce faith by praying for how he is redeeming it
- Calm and faith enable us then to come to **acceptance**

Anxiety Redemption Prayer Example



- Father I am anxious about that lab result
- I pray Lord that as much suffering as can be taken from me within your will here, that you would take it from me. I don't want to have pain in biopsies, surgery or chemo. Please make the next result normal.
- Lord, I acknowledge that you are at work to redeem this somehow. Even though I don't know how, I have faith that you are redeeming it, and I thank you.
- Father, I pray for the fullness of what you are doing, whatever good you are bringing about in my life for my sake and for the sake of others, I pray for it.
- Lord I accept the suffering you have not and will not take away, and I accept the suffering of not knowing at this point what you will or will not be taking away or how you are using it all for good. Give me the strength and courage I need.

Individual Exercise

- *Identify something difficult or anxiety provoking*
- *Pray for God to remedy that situation*
- *Thank him ahead of time for how he is redeeming it, how he is working in it, even if the answer we want is not given immediately and may not be*
- *Pray for that redemption, unknown as it is at the moment*
- *Pray for strength and courage to accept the particular cross*

Exercise

- What was this prayer time like for you?

Reporter:

- Summarize the experiences in the private chat to Christy when you come back to the main session

Questions?

Post your questions by private chat to Christy Gates, will try to answer most commonly asked questions

