**Anxiety Resource Paper**

**Lightbearers resource papers are designed as a resource to Lightbearers staff as they interact with students and partners and are asked to provide wisdom on a variety of topics. These papers should not be considered a doctrinal stance in competition with your local church but an internal resource providing clarity on a sound evangelical stance on particular issues. Please seek out the counsel of the church under whose authority you have placed yourself as needed in responding to specific situations.**

**Foundational to each paper is the perspective that the Gospel is primary. No topic competes with the message of the Gospel for primacy in the church. At the same time, the Gospel impacts every corner of life (1 Corinthians 6:20); therefore, we aim to provide staff with direction that is Biblically sound and points them to view any issue through the lens of the Gospel—the good news that we are far more sinful and God far more holy than we thought but the life and grace that God offers through Christ’s death and resurrection is far greater than we dare to hope.**

 “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us” (1 Thess. 2:8).

God calls us to share Scripture and soul—truth and love. Facing and fighting anxiety is a relational discipleship process, not an exhortational event. Victory in anxiety requires a comprehensive, compassionate biblical theology of anxiety. If we’re to avoid the one-problem–one-verse–one-solution mentality and experience the relevance and power of God’s Word, then we need a biblical anatomy of anxiety.

**In the Beginning**

A biblical worldview would understand God as the Creator of all things, including the rules by which His creation is governed. As He is also sovereign, righteous, holy, and perfect, we can rightfully assume that He knows us best and what is best for us.

In Genesis 2, the first command given to Adam was to work, guard, and keep the garden with the help and favor of God. Remember: Everything at this time had been declared GOOD. Yet, Adam and Eve in their desire to be like God distrusted His commands and even doubted His goodness towards them, resulting in the Fall.

After Adam and Eve’s exile, the original command remained but without the special favor they had from God before. Even worse, God had cursed the very ground which was to help sustain their lives. For Adam and Eve, anxiety was the responsibility of work and to provide for one’s self without help from God. It was a work without faith in God and was a work that was continuously concerned if fruit would be produced. A mistrust of God’s care had led them to now live a life without trusting God.

**A Legacy Continues**

In this fallen world, there are many things to be concerned about and that capacity to feel concern is a gift from God to know when things are not as they should be. It allows us to take refuge in God and present our troubles to Him while lovingly and actively care for others.

Every emotion, though, can be used wrongly. This God-given ability to mobilize the forces of the body and the mind to focus on a problem is often focused on the wrong problem.

Matthew 6:34 – “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Concern over the unknown and uncontrollable future can cause more harm than good. When focused on tomorrow, the purpose of our body’s energies is frustrated because they are being released but not being used. They cannot be used for action because we cannot act upon what we do not know. Worry activates more and more unused energy which produces strain upon your body and mind. Some of the effects it has on our bodies can be stomach issues, fatigue, early death, sleeplessness, lack of faith, fear, etc.

This paper is an overview of the theology of anxiety in reference to people who have moderate amounts of anxiety and do not suffer from severe anxiety. There are situations in which people should seek out medical help when addressing their anxiety. Our goal, though, is to address the majority of discipleship situations rather than the few that may need additional resources.

**The Good News**

When Christ came into the world, he brought redemption into all aspects of life including our tendency to be an anxious people. So how did Jesus redeem our anxiety?

* *With God* – As mentioned before, there are times when worry and anxiety lead to sin – a distrust in the Lord’s goodness, provision, and care. But praise God that “[He] shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8). Because Jesus redeems us to Himself through his sacrificial death, sinful anxiety is not ultimately defeating for a Christian. Jesus has defeated sin and death through the cross! The sin of our anxiety has been paid for and this broken world will one day be made new.

Not only that, but now that we have been reconciled to God, we can boldly approach his throne of grace to bring our worries and cares to Him (Hebrews 4:16). In Philippians 4, the Lord makes a promise to provide us with peace that surpasses all understanding when we do so. This promise is not so much divine intervention into our circumstances but a divine insulation of our hearts and minds.

* *With our circumstances* – Most people naturally fear death and suffering. According to Romans 8:31-39, though, things like tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and death do not separate us from the love of God. In fact, we’re instead promised to be “more than conquerors through him who loved us” (37). The things we fear most are now our servants that are used to conform us into the image of Christ. It is this type of redemption that allows Paul to state, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24). His circumstances had not changed, but there was a new meaning to his suffering – the advancement of God’s kingdom and His glory. The Lord redeems hardships for our sanctification and His glory. Instead of approaching them with fear and worry, we can approach them with “great joy” (James 1:2-4).
* *With each other* – “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” (2 Cor. 1:3). Everyone suffers from worries and fear at some point in their lives. God redeems our anxiety by allowing it to not be wasted. When others are struggling with anxiety, we are better able to comfort and care for them because we ourselves have been comforted by God.

**What’s the best response?**

“do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” – Philippians 4:6

Our reality is that anxiety will be present until the day of completion. But how should we respond while we wait for that day? The biblical response to anxiety is prayer. We conquer worry by taking everything to the Lord in prayer. According to Dr. Neely, “we can become so self-reliant or exhausted by our intense spiritual and mental battles that we forget that in every circumstance prayer is appropriate and necessary. Prayer is a conversation with God and is the means through which we draw on the resources of heaven for our pain and struggles here on earth” (*How to Overcome Worry*).

Just as we come from a long line of anxious people, we also have several people that we can look to as examples on how to respond to worry. These people include Hannah (1 Samuel 1:10-11), Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:2-3), Daniel (Daniel 6:6-13), David (Psalm 22, 51), and others (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:22-31; 12:1-17; 13:1-3; Revelation 5:8; 6:9-10; Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 23:34).

In reference to Philippians 4:6, there are different types of conversing with God: prayer, supplication, thanksgiving, and requests. We should feel freedom to come to God with our requests, including asking for wisdom as to the circumstances of our anxiety (Matthew 7:7; James 1:5-8). It’s essential that these prayers should be paired with a trust in God. True prayer is expecting God to do something then looking for his answers. Ask him – humbly, fervently, expectantly, and persistently. Let us choose to trust God and be obedient and steadfast in our prayers to God as the Bible commands us when it comes to anxiety or worry.

“Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” – Mark 12:29-31

When struggling with anxiety, it is easy to become self-centered and selfish when instead we have been called not only to love and trust God but also love our neighbors. We should therefore especially be a part of biblical community during those seasons. It allows us to shift our focus outward and not on ourselves. This does not mean to neglect going before the Lord but it does mean we are still called to love others and share in one another’s burdens in the midst of it (Galatians 6:2).