

Today I find myself thinking about the whole area of anxiety as I have listened peoples news this week. I strongly suspect all of us have probably experienced anxiety at sometime and no doubt some more than others. Without a shadow of doubt it is a huge and complex subject and I am sure many of you have listened to accounts of friends or family sharing about some of the stress they are encountering and some fear they may have. GP's often express that anxiety is a real problem of our time. Sadly, it has become a big issue as so many battle with anxiety perhaps due to the complexities, changes and pace we can face in our modern life. I expect psychologists define anxiety in a number of ways, but for me it is often linked to listening to feelings of apprehension, uneasiness, worries or dread. I recognise anxiety can come from different forms like phobias or separation, but I find myself dwelling on apprehension mostly.

I have learnt through pastoral ministry that anxiety can arise quickly and also come with high intensity. This can be unexpected and overwhelming, but also it can be persist and it can long lasting. The intensity of anxiety can vary, but whatever the case it can impact our life in many ways such as shortening our attention span, hindering our problem solving skills or sometimes causing physical symptoms like sleep deprivation or migraines.

Last year I preached on the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus taught that we should not be anxious (worrying) about life's basic needs, such as food and clothing or about the future as our heavenly Father knows what we need and will provide. In the New Testament letters both Peter and Paul basically say the same thing. We are told as Christians to bring our request to God, but with an attitude of thanksgiving and knowing that God's peace surpasses our understanding.

I do need to make a distinction between anxiety and realistic concern. Let me explain by looking at St. Paul. The Apostle wrote that he was not anxious (worried) about the possibility of being beaten, cold or hungry, but he states was anxious (concerned) about the welfare of the churches. The pastoral care of others put a daily pressure on Paul and also made Timothy 'genuinely anxious' (that is, concerned) as well. There is nothing wrong with realistically accepting and endeavouring to deal with the identifiable issues of life. It would be wrong and foolish to ignore such problems and perhaps dangerous, but it is also unhealthy to be immobilised with excessive worry. This worry should be committed to God in prayer, as he can release us from paralyzing fear. Admittedly, you can't always switch off worrying like you do with a light bulb. I acknowledge it is difficult sometimes to 'cast our anxiety on to the Lord'; to trust God will meet our needs especially as anxiety can make us impatient for God to work in his perfect timing. It can be a struggle to say, 'over to you God, I completely trust you.' I think Philippians 4 offers us a great pattern which I have found immensely helpful en we are in such a state. Rejoice (v4), Let your gentleness be evident (v5), pray and be thankful (v6) & dwell on the positive (v8).